

# **Survival Training for Law Enforcement**

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**The Israeli Combat System for  
the Urban Warrior**

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## The Israeli Combat System for the Urban Warrior

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Tzviel "BK" Blankchtein  
Ann R. Bumbak



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*To the memory of my father, Daniel Blankchtein, who  
always inspired me to be the best that I could be.*

**—Tzviel ‘BK’ Blankchtein**

*To all the men and women in law enforcement, the true  
modern-day warriors. You are underpaid, underappreciated,  
and overworked. Thank you for the good and often thankless  
work you do every day, saving lives, and keeping the peace.*

**—Tzviel ‘BK’ Blankchtein and Ann R. Bumbak**



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# Foreword

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The truth finally hit me as I was coming home from a football game in Tampa not too long ago. It was a quick getaway to catch a Bucs game and, as I was going through the usual screening process, it hit me. When I was directed to go through the new full-body scanner, I just blurted out, “I’m not going through that thing.”

The TSA employee seemed surprised, perhaps because not too many people protest. I reacted that way because I’m sick to death of our country’s reactive attitude in this so-called “war on terrorism.” What’s next? If the bad guys fill their teeth with explosives, are we going to have full dental exams in the airports for everyone? How about taking a proactive stance and rooting out the bad guys before they have the opportunity to hurt us?

I was sent to an area to be hand screened while continuing to think about how futile our collective efforts have become. The man that did the hand search was a very nice guy and we laughed together when I told him I wasn’t trying to be difficult. I passed through screening and went on my way to the gate, stopping for a quick meal. As I sat down to eat, staring at my serrated-edged steak knife, I just shook my head. I had my body and all my possessions x-rayed and searched and now I’m given a knife with a five-inch blade. Is this really a safer system now than we had before 9/11?

Over the years, I’ve met many dedicated people in law enforcement who have been fighting both crime and terrorism for their entire careers. When BK (Tzviel Blankchtein) honored me with a request to write an introduction for his book, I began trying to find the words that best described why he and I have become friends. It was partially the respect I have for his past and present service to both his native country (Israel) and his adopted one (the United States), but it’s much more than that. He is a guy with a good heart, but the truth is that having a good heart just isn’t enough to win me over. After my experience at the airport, it dawned on me that the reason BK and I get along so well is simple: HE GETS IT!

From the time I had the fortune (or misfortune) of handling the first Al Qaeda murder inside the United States, investigating the killing of Meir Kahane, I have witnessed stumble after stumble on our side when fighting terrorism because the mantra from the law enforcement “experts” has been the usual police/federal agent cultural response:

We've always done it this way, so let's not embarrass anyone by pointing out weaknesses.

Simply put, most law enforcement leaders just don't get it. We police administrators have always done a stellar job, so we react the way all bureaucracies do and that is by covering up mistakes and putting more administrative processes in place.

In today's world, better security is in place for sure, but we need to take the next step—or, more accurately, the next leap. Think about it. First, our nail files and keychain knives were confiscated. Next, our shoes came off. Then, our aftershave had to be left home or put into tiny bottles. Dutch photographers and T-shirt salesmen in New York's Times Square thwart acts of terror and we pat ourselves on the back as if "our" security mechanism was responsible when in fact it was the actions of brave, everyday civilians.

Meanwhile, terrorist operatives still live among us and, yes, we still get real knives when we eat in our airports. And, we can even get glass bottles if we order wine in flight.

BK and I often have conversations about exactly these issues and I've heard him say more than once, "We've been more fortunate than good in our antiterrorism efforts." I couldn't agree more.

BK is a man who has literally fought in the front lines, combating terrorism up close and personal, and now he has shared his experiences and expertise with the rest of us in the pages of this book. Instead of being reactive, he believes that the only way to defeat terrorists is to proactively train, train, and train every day, as if your life depended on it, because it does. He has argued at length for the need for greater intelligence, not merely longer security lines.

After 24 years in police work, I cannot begin to describe my frustration with most police training. Police defensive tactics training is usually not job-related, totally ineffective, and almost never retainable. I'm proud to say that, in addition to being BK's friend and professional colleague, I also have become a student of the Israeli Combat System (ICS). ICS covers all the tactical training needed by police officers. As his student, I finally felt like I had learned something that I could use, something that could keep me alive in the gravest of extremes should the need arise.

This was a welcome change from officially sanctioned training programs that I have been subjected to for most of my career. These "politically correct" classes often had to get the approval of a whole slew of civilian entities before implementation. Just think about it: the cops protecting you and your family most likely got trained in techniques that had to first be approved by your city council or a similar body. Aggressive training using realistic circumstances might be seen by civilians as dangerous, but what are police officers



training for if not danger? Civilian entities have about as much expertise to decide which hand-to-hand combat training cops need as I have to decide about which bypass surgery a heart patient needs.

I believe ICS can and does prepare those in harm's way for the worst case scenario. As a cop, I would much rather invest in the training that will keep me and my family alive than training for an effective clean-up. I sleep much better knowing there are still men like BK in our tent. Simply put, BK and a select few like-minded men truly can help us decide whether we will protect our country well or just continue to throw our antiterrorist funding into postincident response programs. Prevention or recovery operations? You decide.

**Edward Norris**

*Former Deputy Commissioner of Operations, New York Police Department*

*Former Police Commissioner, Baltimore Police Department*

*Former Superintendent, Maryland State Police*



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# Acknowledgments

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Long before I earned the privilege of training others in how to survive, I began my own personal journey in martial arts and defensive tactics training as a young boy in Israel. My initial training in what I consider one of the original mixed martial arts (MMA) disciplines was back in the early 1980s with Skornik Israeli Combat, under the direction of Gadi and Guy Skornik. They were amazing fighters and, even more importantly, great and patient teachers.

Over the course of my career, I have had the privilege of continuing to train with many highly skilled instructors, all outstanding experts in their fields. In particular, I was honored to train with Arie Cohen and Itay Gil in Israel, both masters of combat. They provided me with new insights, skills, and ideas on what defensive tactics are all about. They also taught me the most important lesson, and that is what a real warrior should be.

Like any skilled teacher, I have learned the most from my students. From the six-year-old white belts to the seasoned SWAT officers, my students continually ask the best of me and endlessly inquire. They have taught me to never assume that we have reached the end of our journey together in training. It is for these ever-inspiring students that the Israeli Combat System (ICS) was born. In fact, the reason ICS is continually evolving is because I am always challenged by my students to grow and think differently about the circumstances and reality of combat encounters. The students bring ICS to life and use it in the real world, identifying its vulnerabilities and highlighting its strengths, so that those who follow in their footsteps will have the best training possible. Without these students, we would still be teaching just karate.

In addition to the students, I am truly fortunate to have an amazing staff working with me at Masada Tactical in Pikesville, Maryland. My instructors care about preserving the lives of our students, regardless of their given professions, physical limitations, age, or gender. These dedicated instructors embody what I consider the true instructor's character. They are devoted, disciplined mentors and I am honored to serve and train with them. I would especially like to thank Ben Fleischman, Cy Gatewood, Steve Almendarez, Ber Bulua, and Alex Henderson. They have devoted countless hours to helping me refine ICS into what it is today.

I would also like to thank another fellow instructor and friend who has continuously encouraged me when things got tough, reminding me that

we are doing God's work in keeping police officers safe. For Officer Darrell Townsend, a 19-year veteran with the Baltimore Police Department, you are a true warrior and the biggest teddy bear I know.

Over the course of the past year, I have received continuous encouragement from many individuals, but none was as significant as the support I received from Phaygi Chinn, an ICS instructor and my best friend. I love you for your faith in me and so much more.

Some of my best influences have been instructors, some have been students, but some also have been mentors and friends. I would like to thank Lt. Col. Scott Wilcox, Ernie Kirk, Andrew Corsaro, Benjamin Frankel, and Don Gerkin for their support and countless hours spent conversing about techniques, officer survival skills, and the industry. Their pearls of wisdom are found in the lines of this book.

Many other special people helped in the production of this book. Especially when it came to enduring long, hot summer days and some cold winter ones, too, taking pictures and proofreading the work-in-progress, these individuals were instrumental. Frayda Breitowitz had an amazing eye (and lens to match); she took the fantastic action shots seen in this book. Officers Jason Clarke, Josh Cook, and "Sir" Moe Breitowitz also took time from their busy schedules to model for this book.

This book could not have been written at all, if not for the writing and editing skills of my esteemed colleague, Ann Bumbak. Your endless encouragement throughout the process made this work possible. Ann is the reason this book is here. Thank you.

For my friend, mentor, and teacher Richard Harding, thank you for letting me do my thing.

I would also like to thank all of the staff at the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission for their support. Thank you for your trust in allowing me to implement ICS with the entry-level recruits, and for the hard work you do for all the members of the law enforcement community.

For my family, who instilled the values of following through, support, and doing what is right, without you, I would never have had the opportunity to teach officers how to survive. You deserve the greatest credit for my success.

Lastly, I would like to thank every single police officer, correctional officer, federal agent, or soldier I have ever had the privilege to work with. I do this for you. It is my deepest hope that you find the information in this book beneficial and relevant to your mission. Stay safe and God speed.

**Tzviel "BK" Blankchtein**

For my son, an emerging warrior, who has taught me how to define my victories by sheer force of will and personal determination. And, for my husband, both long-suffering and lion-hearted, who has been my constant companion and a beacon of light during the greatest adventures of our lives. Thank you for the joy you both bring into my life.

Wisdom teaches us that it is not the fights we win or lose by which we are measured, but the way in which we face adversity which defines us. However, when we are on the side of “right” and lawfulness, as we are in police work, we must win the fights nonetheless.

**Ann R. Bumbak**



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# Legal Disclaimer

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Please note that the publisher and the author of this instructional book are not responsible in any manner whatsoever for any injury that may result from practicing the techniques or following the instructions given within. Defensive tactics (DT) training is inherently dangerous, and the reader assumes all risk and responsibility. The reader knowingly and voluntarily accepts and assumes all risks of injury, death, or other loss or damage.

If you are in doubt about any information in the book, consult with a certified DT Instructor prior to proceeding. Since the physical activities described herein may be too strenuous for some readers, it is necessary to consult with a physician prior to beginning any physical training.





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# Gender-Neutral Intent

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We attempted (and hopefully succeeded) to portray officers in gender-neutral terms. However, we consistently referred to subjects in masculine terms (e.g., “bad guy”). This was done for two reasons. First, photos of the resistive subject role player were primarily depicted by a male. Second, we recognize female offenders assault officers and are equally dangerous, but approximately 90% of the attacks on officers are by males. Therefore, for simplicity, we chose to refer to subjects in masculine terms. We hope we have not offended any female criminals by doing so.



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## About the Authors

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**Tzviel “BK” Blankchtein** served in the Israeli Defense Forces as an infantry reconnaissance team member from 1993 to 1997. He was honorably discharged upon completion of mandatory service as a sergeant first class. Blankchtein’s expertise includes firearms, tactical operations, hand-to-hand combat, amphibious assaults, operational security in hostile areas, and intelligence and counterintelligence operations. He has often worked as a consultant in designing training programs for military and law enforcement agencies. In addition, Blankchtein is the Lead Defensive Tactics instructor for the Maryland Police and Correction Training Commission. He is a graduate of the University of Maryland with a bachelor’s degree in Counterterrorism and International Security.

**Ann R. Bumbak** has more than a decade of experience as a police officer and federal agent. She has served in a number of law enforcement roles, from patrol and field training officer with the Dallas Police Department to undercover antiterrorist operative after 9/11, and, finally, as an accomplished trainer of police officers and their managers. A former train-the-trainer program manager with the state of Maryland, Bumbak now works in a consulting capacity for agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), supporting the design of high-quality training solutions for law enforcement.

Bumbak is the author of *Dynamic Police Training* (CRC Press, 2010), a practical guide to implementing police training programs. This one-of-a-kind primer, written specifically for police educators, outlines a common-sense approach to designing and developing law enforcement certification programs in the classroom and beyond. She lives with her family in northern Virginia.

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# Introduction

# 1

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Over the span of an entire career in law enforcement, most police officers will be involved in more than one significant use-of-force event. While a majority of officers will not be forced to discharge their firearm in the line of duty, most will have to physically restrain, control, and otherwise dominate a subject who is under arrest. Whether police officers are young or old, male or female, regardless of race, ethnicity, or verbal skills, the question is not *if* use of force will happen, but rather *when* it will happen.

A study of criminal populations reveals that convicted offenders are not routinely docile and cooperative arrestees. Incarcerated persons continue to train for resisting and defeating police intervention techniques while in jail. They devote untold hours of discretionary time to building strength by using free weights in prison yards. Once released, these types of characters are not interested in returning to custody under any circumstances. They will fight with and kill police officers if given the opportunity.

In 2005, 50 percent of offenders who killed police officers were on probation or parole at the time they committed the murder. And, 70 percent of those who kill police officers have a criminal history. All of them succeeded because they were prepared to win at all costs.

The question is: How do we prepare our police officers for life in the crucible of patrol work? The answer: Training. Consider the police academy environment. A typical training program for law enforcement officers ranges from twelve to twenty-four weeks in length. It is likely to be paramilitary in structure, with uniforms and some degree of administered discipline. Police recruits spend the majority of their time in the classroom, listening to lectures on criminal law, departmental policy, and police procedures. There is a heavy emphasis on written examinations and rote memorization.

To be fair to entry-level training programs, some attention is accorded to survival training, generally in the form of mindset or stress management (sometimes called *inoculation*). Establishing a baseline awareness of the consequences of using deadly force is always addressed, in terms of policy and legality. However, physical and defensive tactics training—the real preparedness for combat situations—is often relegated to the lowly status of a high school gym class.

Nationally, no definitive standards exist for police physical fitness training thresholds. In many cases, only forty hours in the academy is allotted for physical fitness training (PT). Some academies simply allow students to

work on their own fitness in an unstructured way, pointing them to the gym or track and encouraging them to “get fit.” In instructor-led programs, PT coordinators generally consult their reference books for bland cardiovascular proscriptions like more jumping jacks, sit-ups, and jogging in group formation. During piecemeal sessions of sixty minutes, twice per week, recruits attain a minimal level of fitness in order to pass a relatively low standard of performance on an exit-level fitness test.

Once they graduate from the academy, there are often no standards or incentives for maintaining a level of physical fitness. Predictably, fitness levels take a precipitous drop in the first two years after graduation. Fitness, especially cardiovascular fitness, continues to decline in the overwhelming majority of police officers over the course of their careers.

Defensive tactics (DT), commonly viewed as self-defense training, are occasionally given more attention in the police academy. Often, as much as eighty dedicated hours, over the course of twenty weeks, is dedicated to DT. However, much of the time, DT focuses on handcuffing techniques, using pressure points for control of passively resisting subjects, and proper use of oleoresin capsicum (OC) spray (pepper spray) and collapsible batons. Although important skills, they are just not enough in today’s more violent environment. And, as with PT, no definitive national standards exist.

Thus, in the span of 120 hours—less time than the entry-level training requirements for child care workers and truck drivers—trainers must prepare recruit police officers to physically defend their own lives, the lives of their partners, and those of civilians when use of force is needed.

The reality is that police officers are routinely involved in deadly force encounters that do not require a three-mile run or fifty push-ups. A contact with a citizen may escalate from a mere conversation to a violent or even lethal confrontation in a matter of seconds. Where in our training programs, then, do we prepare our officers for the fight of their lives?

## **Are Police Officers Social Workers with Guns?**

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Officer Adams\* prided herself on her ability to effectively negotiate an arrest under virtually any circumstances. After several years on the streets of a major metropolitan police department, she had never been personally involved in any use of force beyond the use of verbal commands. She described herself:

I was essentially a gun-toting social worker, chatting with arrestees on the way to jail about their lives and circumstances that brought them into my [police]

\* Fictionalized name.

custody. I never had anyone resist me, and I thought it was because I was really good at my job.

Then, one night in April 1999, she responded to a call at a residence reporting an incident of domestic violence. She had been to many calls like this before and assumed the same outcome was likely: find the instigator and arrest same. She was the first officer on the scene; she heard a woman screaming and saw a commotion on the front porch. A male subject, “Jake,” chased a female into the alley behind the house. The officer pursued, radioing her location. She found Jake using the female as a human shield as he backed away from the officer’s flashlight beam and drawn weapon. “Show me your hands,” she ordered. Jake responded, “What are you going to do, shoot us?” The officer realized she could not take the shot. However, she did not know what to do when Jake did not obey her commands. She also did not know whether or not to holster her weapon.

Jake soon released his girlfriend, who was conscious, but had sustained a skull fracture after Jake kicked her in the face with his steel-toed boot. Predictably, she was reluctant to leave his side.

Jake stood defiantly in the alleyway, in a fighting stance, waiting for the officer to do something. When backup units arrived, Officer Adams indicated Jake was going to jail, but the subject would not obey verbal commands. As a result, the cover officer immediately escalated his use of force. He took Jake to the ground and handcuffed him, using techniques he had practiced over and over again until they were second nature. His movements were confident, simple, and effective, resulting in a clean arrest without the use of chemical sprays or batons.

Because of the cover officer’s training, all of the people involved in this event survived. However, police calls for service like these occur every day. The story of Jake’s arrest represents the best-case scenario in police use of force situations. Officer Adams learned that she needed some additional tools in her toolbox besides verbal commands and a handgun. In the worst scenario cases, officers do not get to go home at all. They are seriously injured or die in an encounter with circumstances beyond their training limitations.

## **Violence Happens**

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Officer Adams is not an isolated example of a typical police officer today, regardless of gender and experience level. Many officers are simply not equipped to manage the hazards of street patrol because of the lack of technique, expertise, and preparedness in physical methods. Control techniques, takedowns, and traditional static approaches simply are not enough to do the job in today’s patrol environment. Training in force application is not seen

as politically correct, but it is a crucial need because, unfortunately, violence does occur in law enforcement. Police officers need to be trained to win the fight, whether it involves a single, untrained assailant or a group of two or more criminals, armed and capable of violence.

The fact is that some people simply will not be taken into custody willingly. Despite the officer's verbal skills, superior physical strength, and force of the law behind him, there are some people who will not go to jail without a fight. Some of these arrestees are merely temporarily impaired; the alcohol or drugs in their system defeats their good judgment and they resist an officer's lawful orders. Some subjects are otherwise compromised, whether due to an excess of emotion, such as rage, grief, and jealousy, or untreated mental illness. Disturbingly, some deeply troubled individuals seek to commit "suicide by cop" as a viable option to end their suffering. Finally, there are a small number of hardcore opponents, including gang members and violent ex-cons, just waiting for an opportunity to confront and defeat the police. When confronted, these people will fight, and they will not play by "the rules."

## Limitations on Firearms Use

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Civilians often pose this question: Why can't police officers just use their firearm to end a potentially deadly encounter? The answer is that deadly force is not always a viable alternative. Rules of engagement for police officers are not simply assigned *carte blanche*. If Officer Adams had shot Jake in the alleyway behind his home, she would have faced felony charges. The suspect was unarmed and not actively assaulting the police officer. Although the totality of the circumstances, such as the size difference between the officer and suspect and her relative fear of imminent serious bodily injury would be considered, it may not have been a clear, righteous shooting. She might have been exonerated by a jury of her peers, or perhaps not.

The strategy of resorting to the use of firearms as a substitute for failure to train to adequate levels in physical control techniques is an unacceptable course of action in a free society. Even if this were not so, firearms fail to stop some offenders, especially those exhibiting excited delirium or someone under the influence of drugs. Another consideration is that offenders themselves can disarm less-than-prepared officers and then summarily execute them at close range. Level III retention holsters, which contain integral protections against others removing a police weapon from the officer, have saved numerous lives of police officers who were incapacitated during a ground fight. Expertise with firearms is certainly one tool in the officer's toolbox, but it simply cannot be the only tool.

## **Trendy Approaches to Survival Training**

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Thus, trainers must turn to force-on-force training. In recent years, a number of emerging disciplines have made their way to the forefront of police training. Mixed martial arts (MMA) disciplines, such as Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (made famous by the incomparable Royce Gracie), Muay-Thai (also known as kickboxing), and miscellaneous “ground fighting” techniques have all been touted as the flavors of the month for officer survival training. While these programs have substantial merit, there is a glaring and insurmountable difficulty with all of them: the lack of time available. Merely learning how to achieve and maintain key positions in grappling, like the front mount, side mount, and rear mount, can take weeks of practice to master. Unless a student can devote years of study to a fighting discipline, he/she will not be effective in street combat using four or five random MMA techniques.

Furthermore, students who enter training in MMA and related disciplines with low levels of fitness, including the overwhelming majority of police recruits, are incapable of safely practicing the techniques. Because of the inherent demands on joint flexibility, strength, and simultaneous motion in multiple planes (for example, moving a knee both laterally and rotating the foot outward at the same time), students can be easily injured during practice. These limitations invite a high risk of injury and liability concerns for departments when trainers bastardize these disciplines for immediate returns during mere weeks in police training.

Most fundamentally, we also need to ask ourselves if these martial arts techniques work for police officers. Fighting is rarely an organized and fluid endeavor. It is the nature of the beast that combat is spontaneous, evolving, and difficult to master. Techniques that require fine motor skills will be entirely discarded when under stress. Officers that are encumbered with body armor, duty belt, and a firearm may not be particularly effective at executing a roundhouse kick or other sanctimonious moves. They need simple, effective training that works.

Consider also that we will fight like we train. When conscious thought evaporates in the heat of battle, muscle memory programs our bodies to respond as they have been trained to do. When training sessions culminate in the opponent “tapping out,” as they do in MMA contests, your mindset will be on autopilot to seek that surrender in the heat of a real confrontation.

However, in reality, there will be no “tap out” at the end of the fight. There will be blood and pain. Only one party will experience defeat and exhaustion, and we must ensure that it is not our officers. Thus, we must look beyond the sport fighting of MMA and traditional martial arts for something that is easy to teach and master, yet simple to execute under stress.



## The Israeli Combat System

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The Israeli Combat System (ICS) was developed in response to the need for realistic, effective fighting for advanced students of self-defense and martial arts. Borne out of the in-depth mastery of several disciplines, including those utilized by Israeli military forces, law enforcement, and special forces worldwide, ICS offered its students highly realistic training for the first time. Using simulated combat conditions and the application of psychological and physical stress to train students to act decisively, even while dealing with the experience of escalating adrenaline, ICS trains students to fight for survival under harsh circumstances. This new approach closely replicates real-life confrontations and requires a commitment to training using a series of simple drills. These drills are carefully structured to use the natural reaction of the body to execute a fluid, instinctive response to neutralize and disable threats.

ICS is an evolving discipline, ever responsive to new techniques and threats. For example, when machetes were identified as the weapon of choice for MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha)\* gang members in the Washington, D.C. area, ICS responded. Noting that the machete could not be defeated in hand-to-hand fighting with the existing blunt weapon or edged weapon defense, ICS expanded its curriculum to include a machete defense. Tactical ICS trainers researched what worked and what did not, using police officers' actual experiences. The bottom line is that the criminal element countertrains to defeat police tactics. ICS helps police officers stay ahead of emerging trends to keep law enforcement officers safe.

Students of ICS report a high degree of confidence and success in controlling and executing defensive movements during actual combat, a condition that is often only replicated during tournament competition in many fighting disciplines. ICS was first offered to police officers in 2006, when it became apparent that mainstream police training in the academy and beyond was simply not enough to equip officers to win the street encounters with which they were coping. ICS was modified for police officers to take into account the equipment and circumstances in which police officers operate, the types of confrontations officers experience, the liability aspect that violent action creates, and the critical need to end a fight quickly with no lasting physical injuries to the suspect whenever possible.

Since its implementation, ICS training has been provided without cost to all interested members of the law enforcement community. It has been endorsed with a response of overwhelming esteem by police officers in many states as a new solution to an escalating problem of violence against police. Simply put, ICS fuses the best cutting-edge martial arts training with a

\* MS-13 is one of the most violent gangs active on the East Coast of the United States. They are primarily El-Salvadorian in origin, with military experience, training, and structure.

standard methodology of training students under a realistic degree of psychological and physiological stress.

Does ICS work for police officers? The answer is yes. In 2009, an unarmed police officer who had studied ICS was confronted by an armed mugger. After taking the officer's wallet, the mugger tried to move him to a secondary crime scene, a dark alleyway. Knowing the probability that he would likely be shot and left for dead if he went willingly, the officer acted, using his training, to disarm the subject. The mugger's weapon discharged, burning the officer's hand, but the round did not find its target.

Because of the officer's training in ICS, he acted *instinctively* to apply the techniques he knew; he was unfazed by the discharge of the weapon and his own injury. Subsequently, he won the fight, taking away the firearm and controlling the mugger until uniformed police arrived. This is but one recent example of a success story related by an actual student of ICS.

## Final Commentary

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Police trainers need a new approach to law enforcement training in crucial psychomotor skills, street survival training, and force-on-force techniques. Addressing these three crucial areas is paramount to equipping our students to go home safely after every shift. We must begin to fight like we train, and train like we fight. In the coming chapters, we will delineate a step-by-step plan for implementing ICS training for both entry-level and advanced police students. This book will tell you why, how, and what to train to maximize survival training programs using this system.

How do we train our officers for the fight of their life? The answer is—the Israeli Combat System.



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# Law Enforcement Fundamentals

# 2

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## Introduction

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Police officers carry a lot of equipment on their persons. Some of these tools are departmentally mandated and generally the same in size and shape, such as the semiautomatic firearm, holster, and handcuffs on the typical Sam Browne-style duty belt. However, some of these tools may vary from officer to officer and look very different, such as badges, uniforms, and duty boots. Whatever the jurisdiction, one variable is unchanged. When police officers are involved in the fight of their lives, they are *not* going to be wearing T-shirts and athletic shorts.

Israeli Combat System (ICS) tactical training begins with the understanding that we will fight like we train. This approach requires training while wearing the equipment you will wear on the street: boots, BDU (battle dress uniform)-type pants, vests, and belts. Duty belts should include all equipment, including a nonfunctional training gun, inert oleoresin capsicum (OC) canister, handcuffs, and simulated (or actual) radio. Granted, there are situations when it does not make sense for officers in training to wear their full uniforms. Otherwise, we would have a large number of torn, bloodstained, and unserviceable items for police departments to replace. Initially, ICS students should train in the comfort of physical fitness training (PT) clothing. Once basic techniques are mastered, students should apply these new tactics in circumstances simulating the harsh reality of real life on patrol.

Why is this important? Police equipment has a fundamental effect on the body of the wearer. As any police officer who has been involved in a combat situation can tell you, equipment that is not very well attached can and will become dislodged during a struggle. Squad car keys, radios, snap-on belt keepers, chemical weapons, and even firearms can become loose (or completely lost) in a violent episode. Officers should become accustomed to knowing how their tools affect their personal movement, balance, and comfort, especially during strenuous activity.

Reinforcement of the skills necessary for retention and deployment of tools as needed, during combat situations, also is highly important. In order to continually train for the worst case circumstances, students must be fundamentally aware of the tools on their person at all times. Police officers may find themselves in a struggle that culminates in the need for deadly force. If an officer has never practiced the need to disengage and then draw and fire at an assailant, he may not be able to execute this move under stress. Using the

ICS system, police officers train for that eventuality while under psychological stress and physiological combat fatigue.

## ICS Interview Stance

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Operating in a patrol environment, most police officers learn a few fundamental rules about how to stand. Rule #1: Don't carry items in your weapon hand. Rule #2: Keep your hands out of your pockets. Rule #3: When dealing with civilians, adopt the "interview" stance.

This position is taught as a neutral, low-ready stance, with a bladed posture and weapon-side away (Figure 2.1).

In reality, most police officers grow complacent in this stance over time. The interview stance becomes the posture *de rigueur*, the natural position we assume whether we are talking to a suspect or to our own spouse or colleagues. This reality can be viewed as a good habit; however, there is a downside. Although we emphasize the relative safety of this stance in police training, it becomes so inculcated that police officers begin to feel comfortable just because they have assumed this position. The bottom line is that we do not want to be *comfortable* during our shift, we want to be *ready*.

In reality, officers spend most of their time in a low-risk, low-awareness mindset because of limited training in high levels of readiness. Just a few months



**Figure 2.1** Traditional interview stance.



**Figure 2.2** ICS interview stance ready.

out of the academy, officers begin to feel passive and comfortable when they adopt the traditional interview stance because it is so ingrained. When students train in ICS techniques, they begin to notice that a shift in their interview stance takes place. For example, when students know they are preparing to engage in a weapon retention exercise, their posture no longer appears passive and comfortable. They are wrapped tighter and more attuned to the immediate cues of the environment. The interview stance for ICS is shown in Figure 2.2.

This stance is the starting point for any contact made with a suspect. The ICS interview stance allows for more advantageous tactical positioning to increase officer safety while not crossing into a defensive stance.

## Dual Purpose of Verbal Commands

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Verbal commands serve a dual purpose, both a functional and a legal/liability function. While in some cases, there will not be time to issue a command (for example, to stop an imminent threat), the vast majority of the time, officers must communicate with a suspect in order to initially control him. The officer's commands must be short, forceful, and clear. Thus, instructors must help officers develop standard approaches to handling the dilemma of command language.

Complicated words or conflicting commands will be confusing to the suspect. In the final analysis, the truth is that suspect noncompliance may be the result of mere misunderstanding of the officer's commands. A common example of this kind of situation occurs when, under stress, an officer issues a series of rapid-fire commands:

DON'T MOVE! GET DOWN ON THE GROUND! SHOW ME YOUR HANDS!

In a case such as this, the suspect may wonder which command he should obey: the complete stop, the getting down, or the showing of the hands. The end result of poor command language might be an unnecessary and unjustified use of force.

In addition to the need to elicit an action by the suspect, the officer must assure that he fulfills another critical task with his commands, which is identifying himself as a police officer. This is especially important if the officer is off-duty or in plain clothes. This identification is imperative because the suspect must have the opportunity to recognize the officer's statutory authority.

Also, identifying ourselves to citizens and other bystanders is important. Police officers wear uniforms and badges for a reason. Unless you want a well-intentioned Good Samaritan coming to the aid of a suspect resisting your commands, recognize that you must let people know you are the "good guy."

Lastly, other arriving officers must be able to quickly recognize which party is the officer in need of backup. This distinction is crucial. Officers have been injured or killed by friendly fire from responding officers because an officer's identity was not made absolutely clear to them in an escalating situation of violence. This is never an acceptable outcome.

## Command Language

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Verbal self-identification should be limited to one word: *Police*. We do not make distinctions between departments, local officers, federal agents, state troopers, county deputies, or any other labels. People are simply *police* or they are not.

Verbal commands also must address the sighting of weapons. Under duress, which will certainly occur when an officer is involved in a high-stress critical incident, it becomes difficult to breathe normally or articulate complicated concepts. The primitive brain becomes hyperfocused on the threat and communication shuts down.

ICS trains students to use one word descriptions when a weapon is seen to communicate to anyone within earshot, whether they are other officers, civilians, or the suspect himself. For a firearm, the word is *gun*. For other weapons, the word is *weapon*. This is standard practice for many tactical units, including special warfare operators and is very effective under stressful conditions. Using clear language prevents almost any misunderstanding and conveys with crystal clarity to the suspect that you see the weapon and you are prepared to act.

The last part of command language is the use of the actual command for the suspect to do something. An example of this language would be: *Show me your*

*hands*. Police officers must learn that hard looks and harsh words from a suspect are potential threats, but hands pose the greatest threats to officer survival. Always control the hands and, whenever possible, ensure that they are empty.

Thus, we must identify ourselves, state the threat (if any), and give orders. A properly executed set of commands would be:

POLICE! GUN! DROP THE GUN!

This staccato kind of language is not necessarily intuitive; it should be practiced by students repeatedly during training drills. Whenever performing a drill, the students should give clear, loud, verbal commands to the role players. Instructors must assure commands are given by students every time, and that the commands are appropriate to the threat.

## Assumption of Surveillance

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The reality of today's society is that most people carry a high-tech video recording device with them everywhere they go. This device is called a cell phone. Aside from identifying himself and making his commands clear to the suspect, the officer should operate as though all of his actions may be caught on video and could possibly be used against him.

Attempting to prevent or interfere with the videotaping of an officer-involved event is not likely to be successful. Do not waste your time trying to control nonaggressive bystanders. Focus on managing the immediate threat. The officer's commands, whether caught on video or not, are meant to protect the citizens around the incident just as much as they are meant to protect the officer from future liabilities.

## ICS Defensive Stance

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The defensive stance also could be called the "high ready" stance. As it is traditionally taught, this stance is a physical escalation of awareness in that the officer is now prepared to give and receive force application techniques. Often, police training programs teach a low, semicrouching stance, with feet wide apart, and with the weapon side away from the threat. This is a traditional martial arts or "fighting" stance ([Figure 2.3](#)).

Although this sort of stance does keep the weapon side away and provide more balance, it also hinders mobility and makes utilizing strong side strikes a longer, more telegraphic motion. Engaging in combat from this stance is certainly less fluid. Instead of this traditional stance, the ICS defensive stance is quite similar to the interview stance; however, the student's hands now





**Figure 2.3** Traditional defensive stance — a martial arts “fighting” position.



**Figure 2.4** ICS defensive stance — a more protective version for law enforcement.

come up to protect the vital areas of face and neck, and the rear heel is off the ground for easier mobility and pivoting ([Figure 2.4](#)).

This stance allows for quick movement, striking, and defending against personal weapons as well as edged weapons and firearms, while allowing for transition to higher force options.



**Figure 2.5** Maintain tactical advantage by proper positioning.

## Tactical Advantage

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ICS teaches students to always maintain a tactical advantage. The rules of “fair” fighting do not apply in a survival situation where the officer’s life is at stake. The officer achieves a basic tactical advantage by positioning himself at a 45-degree angle to the suspect’s weak side ([Figure 2.5](#)).

This position will allow the officer to use all of his personal weapons (both hands and feet), whereas the suspect will only be able to use half of his own. The officer also will be farther away from any possible strong side weapon attack, allowing a slightly longer reaction time, which may mean the difference between recognizing (and surviving) an attack or being taken completely by surprise.

In addition, the officer must always assume the suspect is more highly trained than he is. In today’s society, with increasing numbers of people training in various fighting arts, it is imperative that the officer stays vigilant in his physical position. Refrain from squaring off to a suspect’s position under all circumstances.

## Strategy of Disengagement

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When an officer becomes involved in a violent encounter, the officer should seek to disengage from hand-to-hand fighting and transition to a force option that will stop the threat in the quickest way, with least amount of potential injury. Why? The answer is that if an officer loses the upper hand in a hand-to-hand fight, he can be disarmed and killed with his own equipment. This is not an acceptable outcome.



**Figure 2.6** Side control.

At the other extreme, however, an officer cannot always simply use his firearm to end a fight. Therefore, once an encounter has turned violent, officers should gain enough distance to effectively bring a chemical weapon, baton, or electromotor disruption device (i.e., TASER™) into play to defeat a suspect's resistance without causing permanent injury, unless deadly force is clearly authorized.

Sometimes, disengaging will not be possible. If the officer cannot disengage, creating an advantage by working the angles becomes a survival necessity. For example, a position that will be discussed in more depth is the side control (or side clinch) shown in Figure 2.6.

In the side control position, the officer maintains a tactical advantage while controlling the suspect. This position protects the officer from closely engaging a suspect who may have a longer reach. It also allows the officer to utilize more of his personal tools, move the suspect, use the suspect for cover when dealing with multiple attackers, and provides many other tactical advantages.\*

## Corrective Action Philosophy

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ICS views the role of the instructor as the student's guide on a shared journey of personal growth and difficult self-development. The instructor should be a leader, stern and uncompromising when necessary, but supportive of students who give full effort. During drills, the success of a student's performance against the suspect is a critical competency. If the student takes too

\* The main risk with the side control position is that, when fighting a trained individual, if done incorrectly, the officer may become more susceptible to takedown techniques. Coping with takedowns will be addressed later in this book.

long to locate a threat, if he appears flustered or overwhelmed by an inability to manage internal stress levels or otherwise performs poorly, ICS proscribes physical consequences.

Correction, in the form of push-ups or other exercise for the student who performs poorly, is a common approach to remediation in traditional martial arts. ICS also recommends this kind of intervention as crucial to the method of warrior training. This policy is not to humiliate students. It exists to reinforce a student's overall physical strength and endurance. It also serves as a warning to students who do not give full effort to drills.

## Final Commentary on Fundamentals

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The stances and basic movements of this chapter keep one important aspect in mind and that is that no fight is ever a static situation. Fights are typically short, explosive, and very dynamic. As such, the students must be able to issue commands and move. While moving, the officer must maintain his balance, ability to defend himself, ability to counterstrike, and the option to disengage and transition to higher force options if applicable.

All training programs should incorporate varied scenarios and stress drills to reinforce initial lessons. Instructors must always ensure that students have the core understanding of new techniques before moving on to another exercise. Students must become confident in the knowledge that the techniques will be natural to execute under extremely stressful situations. With confidence comes better execution. It is a positive, self-reinforcing cycle.

Instructors must approach training as a facilitation of an overall shift in students' fundamental awareness and preparedness levels. The "stress inoculation" components of the drills described seek to mimic the reality of actual confrontations. We don't fight with people who are clearly our opponents at the beginning of an encounter, at least not most of the time. Offenders undertake this role when they make a conscious decision to disobey our lawful commands or use physical force against us. In doing so, they choose to leave the protected status accorded to regular citizens and must be controlled.

Likewise, it is important that the students learn that, when involved in a street confrontation, it is not the person with the "cleaner and prettier" technique who will win the fight. The winner will be the one who *does not quit*. We must equip our students to be those winners, every time.

ICS training sessions emphasize mindset, specifically the "never quit" approach. Instructors must train students to keep fighting, even if they fail to execute a technique correctly. Recruits must understand that in real life there

is no “rewind.” In the ICS Baltimore training facility, the graffiti on the wall reminds students:

**No warm-ups. No time-outs. No do-overs.**

Students must be conditioned to continue with their defense, even if they do it incorrectly. Training is the opportunity to fix it the next time around. Combat, on the other hand, does not afford us that luxury.

Students should be evaluated based on a final resolution of a conflict, not the process of engagement. In the end, all that really matters is that the officer goes home at the end of his shift. ICS trains students to thrive in circumstances characterized by stress, and to go home at all costs.

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# Combative Skills

# 3

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## Introduction

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The art of unarmed combat is an often neglected area of tactical training for police officers. Although mainstream police training programs (including the Israeli Combat System (ICS)) recommend disengagement and transition to an applicable weapon (like a baton or chemical spray) as a fundamental strategy for surviving street confrontation, situations may occur in which an officer must employ unarmed defense to counter a suspect's attack. After all, some suspects do use weapons in assaulting police, but most do not.

Historically, a lot of conventional wisdom on fighting stresses the nobility of "fighting fair." Police officers simply do not have this luxury. In particular, circumstances of extreme danger can occur when an officer hesitates to use force in an escalating incident. Officers defending others may need to use immediate, serious force to protect a potential victim when a firearm cannot be used. For example, a backup officer arriving at a scene where another officer is engaged in combat and losing the ability to protect himself (and his equipment) may need to use a punch or kick to win and end the fight. Officers intervening in a serious assault occurring between two combative civilians, such as in the setting of a domestic or bar fight, may precipitate the use of the personal weapons to disable the aggressor who will not comply with other means. Suspects who are exhibiting excited delirium also may be impossible for one or two officers to control if they are caught unaware by the extraordinary strength and invincible response to chemical weapons or batons that is a hallmark of this condition ([Figure 3.1](#)).

This chapter will explain how to build a basic training profile for students to practice administering and reacting to techniques of unarmed combat.

## Personal Weapons: The Basics

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Personal weapons include all body parts the officer may use to strike an opponent when needed. Specifically, these body parts include: head, elbows, forearms, fists, fingers, knees, shins, and feet. It is important to note that the use of these personal weapons is generally encumbered by the carrying of police equipment, like the duty belt.

When educating officers about personal weapons, it is imperative to note the relationship between the striking weapon and the target area. For



**Figure 3.1** Cross: a basic combative skill.

example, the skull is a very dense, hard surface to strike. Targeting a suspect's skull with the wrong personal weapon (like knuckles) will most likely result in a serious injury, such as breaking the fingers (or fist) of the officer. An officer with one or more broken hands cannot smoothly transition to another weapon—a baton or firearm—as effectively as an uninjured officer.

A general rule is that a hard weapon (like a knuckle) should be used against a soft target (like a nose). Likewise, a soft weapon should be used against a hard target and vice versa. However, this rule is not always set in stone, and some exceptions will be discussed later in this chapter.

## Police Use of Force Considerations

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A key consideration when deciding on a target for personal weapons is the need to consider the level of the current threat posed by the suspect. For example:

- Is the opponent obviously more skilled in fighting or significantly larger or heavier than the officer?
- Is the suspect in a fighting stance?
- Is he armed or unarmed?

Remember that we cannot simply end all fights with the use of a firearm. However, even in cases where deadly force is clearly warranted, accessing a

firearm may not always be an option. It may be lost in the fracas of a fight, or not present at all under certain off-duty circumstances.

Another use of force consideration for police officers is the severity of the application of force to the given target. The eye, for example, can be a target of minimal force when just “poked,” causing the assailant to stop fighting because of the shut-eye reflex. On the other hand, an eye *gouge*, in which the thumb may penetrate the orbital cavity, transverse the optic nerve, and make contact with the opponent’s brain, will likely be a fatal strike.

When students practice unarmed combat techniques, especially during force-on-force drills, the instructor must pay close attention to the targets chosen by the student. Critical, high-yield targets include the face, nose, solar plexus, and joints that can easily be hyperextended or broken. However, untrained students will often strike at targets of easy opportunity, which, depending on the force applied, may well cause no damage at all to the suspect, such as the buttocks, skull, and abdomen.

Remedial training and specific guidance should be given to students to refine the target choice. High-yield targets, which cause more damage with less effort, require a higher degree of skill to strike effectively, and students cannot master these skills without practice. Encouraging development of the skill to strike vulnerable areas with precision is a key component of ICS training.

## **Fighting in Close Quarters**

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Police officers are usually taught to maintain all interactions at six feet or more, whether the subject is a victim or suspect. However, when involved in a violent encounter, unarmed suspects must close this gap to strike the officer. Thus, using personal weapons as a defense becomes the method of choice in close quarters combat situations.

The obvious problem with fighting in close quarters is the lack of space with which to maneuver effectively as well as the inability to disengage. Flailing limbs, body fluids, and other distractions can cloud the perceptions of both parties. Therefore, it is rarely elegant or clean to fight in close quarters, and students, at first, should expect to find the experience very uncomfortable.

## **Distance and Weapon Selection**

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At extremely close proximity, the head can be used to stun an opponent. If space allows, the elbows are another effective option to gain operational distance. A slightly larger space between opponents may be too far for an elbow,



but too close for a fist, so a hammer fist strike becomes the ideal choice. Moving farther away, the degree of separation becomes an ideal punching distance.

Lower body weapons at this range are the knees (close range) and the shins (medium range). Lastly, the legs and feet are personal weapons with the longest range.

## Three Areas of Vulnerability

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Police officers generally bring at least one weapon to every encounter. Whether merely a chemical spray or the greater versatility of the baton or firearm, it is crucial to remember that if a criminal can disarm an officer, he will use these weapons against him. Thus, there are three vulnerable targets that will definitely incapacitate the officer and render him unable to continue fighting: the eyes, knees, and trachea. If these targets are struck by a suspect effectively, the officer must be prepared to use higher force options, including lethal force to end the fight if he wants to survive. Indeed, if he does not recognize the imminent and serious danger these areas of vulnerability present, he will not survive.

The first target that must be protected at all costs is the eyes. If you cannot see, you cannot fight effectively or protect your crucial weapons and other equipment. Most importantly for officers is the complete inability to fire on a target when blind; this removes the firearm option from the hostile encounter equation. This dichotomy is also present with chemical weapons; they can incapacitate the suspect, but they also can incapacitate the officer and his backup. If you are blinded by a suspect, recognize the immediate deadly threat this situation presents and do whatever it takes to decisively end the fight.

The second target is the knees. Complex marvels of anatomy and remarkably exposed to danger during a confrontation, the knees represent the fighting platform. Injuries to the knees can involve fracture, dislocations, or tears to the meniscus or ligaments, given only an incidental application of force. Less than 10 pounds of force applied in the wrong direction and an officer will, at a minimum, sustain a career-ending injury, if he survives the fight at all. If an officer's knees are injured during a fight, he will go down and be unable to disengage from the confrontation. Lying on the ground at the feet of the opponent is an extremely hazardous position. As with the eyes, if the knees become incapacitated, the officer must end the fight immediately.

The third target that must be protected at all times is the trachea. If you cannot breathe, you cannot fight—or live for very long. A suspect who places an officer in a chokehold is demonstrating both the willingness and ability to use deadly force. The lesser effect of chokeholds is the restriction of blood supply to the brain and eventual unconsciousness. A greater danger is injury

to the trachea itself (spasm, tears, or collapse) and the loss of oxygen to the brain and other internal organs, with the subsequent death that follows. A compromised airway requires an immediate end to the fight.

In a hand-to-hand confrontation, protecting the eyes, knees, and trachea are the most important of all officer survival skills. Likewise, recognize that if you target these areas in a confrontation with a suspect, with judicious and defensible use of force, the fight will end quickly. For better or worse, police officers cannot simply mete out life-threatening or permanent injuries to suspects with complete impunity. Always follow your departmental use of force guidelines, but ensure that you have other options for survival if the tide of the battle turns against you.

## **Pressure Points: Useful or Useless?**

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Most police officers have become acquainted with the use of pressure points to control suspects, especially those who are passively resisting. Pressure point control systems teach that application of pressure to locations of abundant nerve endings can aid police officers in controlling unruly suspects through pain compliance. Entire certification programs are devoted to the science of pressure point applications and thousands of people are active in this discipline. However, after basic training ends, the reality is that officers who can (or will) apply more complicated pressure point techniques in the field are few.

In fact, many police officers report that they do not consider pressure points a realistic option at all, preferring “come-alongs” (escort holds and joint manipulation techniques) or other kinds of control techniques. One of the problems with pressure point control is the intimate quarters required for correct application. Many times, a body part (like the suspect’s head) must be cushioned or reinforced by one hand, while the other hand applies the technique with just the right amount of force, in exactly the right place, to elicit a response. With both of the officer’s hands occupied, it is difficult to remain either comfortable or tactically safe in this situation for long.

Also, trying (often, in vain) to precisely locate a small target using pressure application, under the stress of a field confrontation, will be detrimental to the officer’s situational awareness and position. Tactically speaking, it is a little like trying to find a parking space in a jammed parking lot. Getting bogged down with searching for the right “spot,” anatomically speaking, and then applying the force at the correct angle is simply too much to remember and execute under stress.

ICS proponents agree that there are situations where a well-administered strike to a nerve-rich area will be more beneficial than the application of other kinds of force. During combat, officers and their opponents will resort

to more primitive, limbic system responses triggered by the adrenaline in the bloodstream. Thus, using simple strikes to broader-range areas of high nerve concentration is the best aspect of pressure point methodology.

Seeking to cause motor disruption that stuns the opponent or renders a limb temporarily dysfunctional, ICS focuses on two pressure point locations for standing combative situations: one for the upper body and one for the lower body. For the upper body, ICS teaches the brachial plexus hammer fist strike. For the lower body, ICS wholly supports the common peroneal (location near the fibula) strike.\*

## The Straight Punch: Basics

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Straight punches are the most common of all attacks, and are often the method of choice for assailants with little or no training in fighting disciplines. Deriving a basic understanding of punch dynamics will assist ICS students in recognizing the posture just before a punch is administered. After all, the human body generally telegraphs its intention when a punch or other strike is conceived in the mind of the opponent. Whether it is in the perception of the fighting stance, the lowered center of gravity, or the characteristic wound-back, strong arm, ready to deliver a haymaker to the eye of the officer, the signs are unmistakable.

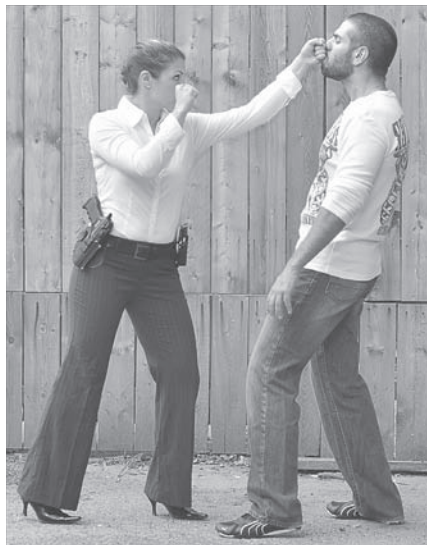
Generally speaking, there are two kinds of straight punches. A forward strike with the front (lead) hand is called a *jab*. A jab is often used to distract or disorient an opponent (Figure 3.2).

A strike with the rear (strong) hand is called a *cross*. A cross is a power strike designed to inflict damage and, potentially, unconsciousness (Figure 3.3).

Developing the ability to deliver a strike to an opponent without self-injury will allow the officer to gain control of a fight quickly and protect himself. There may be no other option available to an officer who must control an escalating situation.

Applying a straight punch requires a small amount of technique to reduce the chance of injury to the officer's hands and wrists. Contact with the target should be made with the top two knuckles of the fist (index and middle fingers) only. The wrist should be locked into a neutral, straight position. The thumb should be placed across the second phalanges to avoid injury (Figure 3.4).

\* The application of the mandibular angle will be discussed in Chapter 8, Ground Fighting.



**Figure 3.2** Jab, or lead hand straight punch.



**Figure 3.3** Cross, or strong rear hand straight punch.



**Figure 3.4** Proper fist.

The power of a straight punch comes from the hip, like a shock wave traveling across the body. Engaging the entire torso and hip will generate far greater torque and power than merely using the shoulders and arms. Feet should remain solidly on the ground to allow for kinetic energy to be generated.

The strike should be delivered as if aiming through the target. Aiming too short will result in a weaker strike, whereas aiming too long presents a risk of injury to the officer due to potential hyperextension of the elbow. As the force leaves the hand on the platform of an outstretched arm, closer proximity to the target produces better results.

The nonstriking (“off”) hand should remain in front of the officer’s face to protect against a possible counter attack. Strikes must always be recoiled as soon as contact is made and force transferred. This is done to prepare for a follow-up strike and to avoid having an arm “trapped” by a skilled opponent.

## Palm Heel Strikes

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The base of the thumb is a soft surface that will allow the officer to strike a hard surface. It is also an alternative to a straight punch when an officer is attempting to protect his knuckles due to injuries, or when he wants to cover a larger target surface area. When reacting to a suspect who assaults a seated officer (for example, through the window of a patrol car) or a taller opponent in a street encounter, the palm heel is an ideal strike to the chin of the opponent. To execute a palm heel strike, students follow the same principles as those of the straight punch, including hip torque, striking through the target, and recoil. The wrist should be pulled back with the fingers curled to avoid the fingertips making contact with a hard surface, such as a skull, before the hand does. The thumb should be tucked into the side of the hand ([Figure 3.5](#)).



**Figure 3.5** Palm heel strike. Note the inwards turn of palm to increase power and surface area.

## Hammer Fist Strikes

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The hammer fist is a medium distance weapon. It can be delivered in two directions: forward or downward. A forward hammer fist to a suspect's face, clavicle, and sternum in situations with limited space available delivers greater force per square inch than a straight punch. It also can be delivered in a downward motion. This is particularly effective as a follow-up to an initial strike that causes the suspect to lose his equilibrium in a forward-leaning direction. When delivered downwards, the target area must be considered. Some options include the scapula, spine, and base of skull, depending on the required result.

When using the hammer fist, students employ the meaty part of the fist to make contact with the target. The student must develop a habit of avoiding a large “coil” motion to minimize the telegraphic nature of such a coil. The coil should be avoided to prevent exposing the face as a target for the opponent (Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7).

As with the straight punch and palm heel strike, the officer should use his whole body to generate power. The elbow extension motion should be minimal.

When delivering a downwards hammer fist strike, the officer should make sure to bend at his knees and not just extend his arm, which may increase chances of elbow hyperextension (Figure 3.8). Also, when striking downwards with the target area of the suspect's face, the officer should offset in the direction of the striking hand to avoid making contact with the skull. When striking with the left, move left; likewise, when striking with the right,



**Figure 3.6** Forward hammer fist. Note the improper starting position telegraphing the “coil.”



**Figure 3.7** Forward hammer fist. Proper “coil” position.



**Figure 3.8** Hammer fist strike.

move right. Lastly, students should always recoil the strike after the maximum force has been delivered.

The hammer fist strike also can be delivered sideways to a suspect's face. This is ideal when the officer is dealing with multiple attackers and needs to deliver a strike while changing directions.

## Elbow Strikes

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Elbows represent a personal weapon that can be utilized at extreme close proximity, such as when held in a bear hug by an opponent. An elbow strike can be delivered in any direction and within any plane, whether horizontal, vertical, or diagonal, making it a very versatile tool. However, it is important to remember that elbow strikes should only be employed at very close range. If the officer has to advance in order to deliver an effective elbow strike, he should probably use a different technique.

Contact should not be made with the tip of the elbow joint, but rather an inch above or below the joint. Targets of choice for elbow strikes include the side of the head, chin, abdominal area, and solar plexus. Like all power strikes, energy should be generated from the hips, regardless of the direction of the elbow. Students should develop the habit of recoil once maximum contact is made.

## Front Snap Kick

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The use of kicks by police officers in the patrol setting is viewed with some apprehension by police managers. Because of an ongoing debate over police



brutality, kicks can be viewed as a less “politically correct” option. While unquestionably effective when used, the circumstances under which officers may use kicks can be specifically limited by departmental use of force policy. It is essential that you are familiar with your department’s policies and act accordingly. However, when other options are not available or an officer’s survival is at stake, a kick is certainly an acceptable alternative to being disarmed and killed.

The front snap kick has multiple applications, from a straightforward strike toward an opponent’s knee or shin, to a rising kick delivered to the opponent’s femoral nerve cluster or even the groin. Depending on the use of force policies and specific circumstances encountered by an officer, the front snap can cause an opponent to lose ground, temporarily incapacitate an active attacker, or give an officer needed distance to transition to another weapon.

The front snap is delivered quickly. First, the officer will raise his knee forward while generating force using his hip. As the knee comes up, the officer will begin extending his leg (snap), aiming through the target to assure maximum force and prevent injury associated with the knee’s hyperextension ([Figure 3.9a](#) to [Figure 3.9c](#)).

Once contact is made, the officer will recoil his leg. Depending on the follow-up desired, he may recoil forward or backward. If the kick is delivered to the suspect’s knee or abdomen (midsection), contact should be made using the ball of the foot. Alternately, if the intended target is the inner thigh or groin, contact should be made with the instep or shin area, depending on the officer’s distance from target.



**Figure 3.9a** Front snap kick: Starting position, defensive stance.





**Figure 3.9b** Front snap kick: Knee raised, midtechnique.



**Figure 3.9c** Front snap kick: Contact is made.

## Round Kick

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The round kick is intended to be delivered at the target of the opponent's knee or thigh. It is intended to disable the opponent's leg, sweep him to the ground, or otherwise render him incapable of standing. The vast majority of the time, if an opponent is knocked to the ground, the officer gains a significant tactical advantage.

This kick is delivered on a horizontal plane, level with the ground. Thus, the officer's hips must be squared toward the target. While ordinarily squaring off is not a recommended position, it is required for accurate delivery of this kick. The risk of assuming this position is offset by the speed with which it is executed.

In order to achieve this position, the officer must pivot his front (base) foot. The pivot can be executed as a step, or by simply pivoting on the ball of the foot. As the pivot is performed, the officer will begin raising his knee and chambering for the kick. The officer will snap his striking leg outward, driving his kick through the opponent's leg. Note that the shin is a hard surface and contact to other hard surfaces (like the opponent's shin) should be avoided. Targeting the thigh, the back of the knee, and even the ankle are more acceptable targets ([Figure 3.10](#)).

As part of the follow through after the kick is delivered, the officer will recoil his leg and follow up with other tools as needed. In particular, it is highly recommended during recovery to avoid remaining squared off to the suspect.



**Figure 3.10** Round kick: Officer pivots on the base foot.

## Side Kick

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The side kick is a devastating kick that can be delivered to an opponent's knee, shin, or top of the foot. It is delivered in a stomping motion, and will cause severe injury to the opponent's limb. In cases where a deliberate, permanent injury to a suspect is a defensible course of action, the side kick is an excellent choice to end a losing fight quickly.

In order to execute this kick, the officer should position himself approximately 90 degrees to the suspect's position. Often, because of tunnel vision, the lateral nature of this strike may come as a surprise to a fighting opponent who is not aware of the officer's position or intended target. This situational advantage adds to the impact of the strike on the target, both psychologically and physically.

The officer will raise his foot off the ground, leading with the knee. Then, the officer will stomp toward the target, by extending his knee, shifting his hip, and delivering maximum force using all of his body. Contact is made using either the foot or heel, but contact *should not* be made using the outside of the foot, to prevent possible injuries to the officer (Figure 3.11).

The officer should then recoil his leg and regain his balance, and then reassess the threat and follow up as necessary.

The side kick could probably be characterized as a kick of last resort for dire situations; however, this does not mean that it is not a valuable technique. Obviously, this kick will be delivered only to a subject who is actively, dangerously noncompliant. Know your department policy, and consider the side kick as another option to use in unexpectedly violent situations.



**Figure 3.11** Side kick: Officer must maintain sight of suspect.

## Final Commentary on Basic Combative Skills

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Once students have been introduced to the variety of strikes available using personal weapons, including straight punches, palm heels, hammer fists, and elbow strikes, other drills that can be used to allow freestyle combinations to develop are recommended. Students with less experience can work together to learn several instructor-generated combinations, whereas students with more experience can “mix it up” on their own with their partners, under less direct supervision. Fighting techniques practiced in this way will increase the students’ comfort with strikes and level of overall physical conditioning.

Officers must always be cognizant of the threat of legal ramifications for excessive force. Using personal weapons against certain target areas can be viewed as the application of deadly force, under certain circumstances. For example, applying maximum strength kicks to a suspect’s abdomen, groin or throat can cause massive hemorrhages or internal injuries that can cause death. Also, devastating kicks that cause permanent injury to a suspect’s legs may lead to a lawsuit. Know your departmental policies and act within the scope of these policies.

Likewise, applying force using high-tech martial arts techniques while in uniform may appear radically violent and excessive to the watchful public. An expectation of a “professional” appearance in the public eye, even when involved in a combat situation, is a fact of life for uniformed police officers. Use caution and common sense to recognize that some techniques are not allowed by use of force policy under most circumstances. However, when your life is in imminent jeopardy, your need to survive, using techniques that are not necessarily “politically correct,” trumps all.

An understanding of basic strikes using personal weapons is critically important in all officers' repertoire, as they may find themselves on the receiving end of a traditional punch or kick when combat is initiated by suspects. Officers must be prepared to adapt and respond to combat situations, including unarmed assaults. An in-depth understanding of the motions and techniques of unarmed combat is an excellent addition to any police officer's personal toolbox.



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# Unarmed Defense

# 4

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## Introduction

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Philosophically speaking, the basic essence of fighting to win can be summarized as: The best *defense* is a good *offense*. In times past, police officers might have administered a preemptive beating to a suspect who was less than cooperative. By exponentially increasing the level of force used and employing a higher level of force simply as a course of regular “business,” fewer suspects were able to overwhelm and execute police officers with impunity.

However, police work is no longer a profession that encourages or tolerates using blanket applications of force, as a rule. From a legal perspective, we cannot simply overwhelm our citizens with applications of force as a response to any resistance. Unfortunately, as a result, police officers (instead of suspects) are now on the receiving end of unexpected assaults—the victims of the “good offense” practiced by the criminal element.

The national FBI bulletin *Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted* (LEOKA) reports confirm the reality of attacks on police officers through statistical analysis. LEOKA reports show that around fifty police officers are murdered in the line of duty every year.\* Most are killed by offenders with firearms. In contrast, around 250,000 are assaulted and injured each year, mostly by unarmed attackers. In these cases, officers must defend themselves quickly and, typically, without immediate access to weapons of the profession.

Echoing the timeless maxim of fighting to win, the ICS principle for unarmed defense is to first *defend* against the most immediate threats and then *advance* on combative or resisting subjects. There are combat situations where the most immediate threat, in fact, may be contrary to the intuitive. For example, a choke employed with an accelerating, impending collision against a brick wall presents two threats: the choke itself and the collision. Untrained fighters will often panic once their airway is compromised by a choke, frantically struggling against the restraint hold and ignoring the signs of a worse circumstance immediately approaching, courtesy of an accelerating motion head injury. Which defense should take precedence, the choke

\* It is important to note the difference between killed and murdered police officers. For example, many officers lose their lives in motor vehicle accidents each year. LEOKA examines only felonious murders and assaults—intentional acts of violence against officers—as distinguished from accidental deaths.

defense or the collision defense? Although a choke compromises the vulnerable trachea, choke defense is pointless if the officer is about to be knocked unconscious due to head trauma. Stay conscious by preventing the collision, then you can defend against the choke.

Similarly, consider a headlock from the side. It presents the initial threat of being pulled into an object or being taken down as well as a choke. To survive such an attack, one must first regain equilibrium by adequate foot work to prevent a potentially fatal collision with a wall or other unforgiving object. Then, one can address the secondary threat of the choke by tucking in the chin.

We have already discussed the fact that the Israeli Combat System (ICS) trains to rigorous standards of realism, duplicating combat conditions as closely as possible during training. This standard means that students are regularly exposed to a degree of pain, whether from an attacker's impact or their own muscle and joint movement, inducing combat fatigue on a regular basis. In civilians, the experience of pain leads to fear, panic, and freezing up in response to aggression. Police officers must divest themselves of this inclination through training.

ICS prepares students to use quality defenses that can minimize the damage inflicted by traditional attacks. The inside and outside defenses, deflection, and use of kicks to defend against strikes will be examined in this chapter. An in-depth discussion of the methods to defeat chokes, headlocks, and "bear hug" attacks will round out these defensive tools.

## Parry/Inside Defenses

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The parry or inside defense is used against an attack originating at or very near the centerline of the body. It is a traditional defense that is used against a straight punch, but it also can defeat an uppercut, a straight stab attempt, and even a rising front kick coming straight up toward the face of the officer. When executed well, it diminishes the effectiveness of an opponent's strike (Figure 4.1a and Figure 4.1b).

An opponent who has managed to close the reactionary gap and take a swing at an officer has already gained an unacceptable advantage. Because the inside attack is much faster and shorter in overall distance to execute than some other telegraphed attacks, the objective of the parry is not to *stop* the attack, but rather to *deflect* it, so it misses its intended target. Thus, the end result is contact, but it consists of a glancing blow rather than a solid, bone-jarring strike.

To execute the parry, the defense is made with the "same side" hand. Therefore, if the attacker uses his right hand, the officer uses his left hand, in the style of a mirror image (Figure 4.2a). The officer will aim for contact



**Figure 4.1a** Proper starting position for a parry. Not too close, not too far.



**Figure 4.1b** Improper starting position with hands too far out.

around the attacker's forearm, to absorb some of the force momentum and displace the intended attack. Contact is made as far away from the officer's body as possible to allow the highest level of force redirection (Figure 4.2b).

To best illustrate the relationship between the degree of force and relative redirection achieved, it is important to understand that the parrying principle is not only a *degree* of force issue, but is also a *relative* force issue. Those trainers who are not experts in mechanical physics need to know that force application and acceleration are integrally related components of a successful defense. For example, a defense made with a one-inch margin of error, successfully implemented at a distance from the officer's face, will create a larger degree of redirection than a defense that is made with a three-inch margin of error close into the officer's face.

Thus, the longer the travel distance of the strike following the redirection, the greater the chances of it missing the intended target. Put simply, the closer the parry is to the officer, the more relative force and redirection will be generated in the strike. If a defense is delayed until the last possible moment, the strike will be too close to parry and the force will drive the parry into the officer's body or face.

Like all good techniques, successful execution requires significant repetitions to build muscle memory. Individual experience in practice will establish an officer's comfort level with arm extension. Shorter officers will need to be closer to the offender than taller officers, whether to strike or defend





**Figure 4.2a** Initial contact is made using an inside defense to deflect the strike.



**Figure 4.2b** Officer offsets and is ready to counter strike.

well. Taking into account his reach, the officer must ensure his hands are not extended too far from his center of gravity, compromising his balance and precariously exposing his most vulnerable target, the head. This distance is only found through experimentation and multiple repetitions.

Once the strike is parried, the officer adds a defense by moving his head in a weaving motion, away from the attacker and off-setting his body. The officer will then immediately advance toward the attacker and engage in a counterstrike. The goal of this tactic is to reinforce the need for violence of action, to capitalize on the natural surprise that accompanies a successful parry. Thus, the officer can press his advantage and end the fight quickly.

## Outside Defenses

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An outside defense aims to block an opponent's hooks, haymaker strikes, and outside attacks using edged weapons. In contrast to the parry, this is a defense meant to physically stop (rather than redirect) the incoming strike. Highly versatile, this defense can be executed in any angle around the body.

Like the parry, the officer should seek to meet the attack as far out from his body as possible. This is especially true in the case of an edged weapon attack when a possible stab can result from delaying the employment of a defense. ICS students train to spot the shifting weight of the opponent's center of gravity to predict movements.

The outside defense should be made "wrist-to-wrist" to avoid a hard surface striking another hard surface. Think of the defense as an attack in its own right, capable of causing pain and motor disruption. This is a tightly executed movement. It should be performed with the elbow bent at a 90-degree angle, so that the strike does not slide down the arm; a paramount consideration when dealing with an edged weapon.

Rather than waiting to see if a block is effective, counterattacks should be made simultaneously with the outside defense. ICS recommends officers take advantage of the possibility that experiencing a thwarted initial attack may confuse the attacker for a few fractions of a second. As the attacker regroups and shifts his attention from his ineffective strike to a defensive posture or even considering a retreat, the officer can capitalize on this disorientation and react proactively. A less-effective counterstrike delivered with gusto is superior to a perfectly executed counterstrike that takes too long to reach a target (Figure 4.3).



**Figure 4.3** Outside defense with counterstrike: Note how the officer advances to counter the suspect's attack.

## Giving Up Ground

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In a combat situation, an officer must recognize that backing up when engaged in an unarmed confrontation is not a good option. Never give up ground to an opponent. Although gaining distance is important when the need to transition to another weapon arises, giving up ground to an attacking assailant will encourage him to physically advance and continue attacking. Throughout the history of warfare, the retreating army has typically been decimated by the opposition. It is important to note that a *psychological* advantage is surrendered when an opponent begins shrinking from an attack. Psychological advantages increase physical aggression in the opponent who begins to believe that he is winning the fight. This is not an ideal circumstance for officers fighting with a suspect.

Instead, students of ICS become comfortable during physical confrontation by reinforcing the impetus to meet aggression with equal or greater aggression. If a suspect strikes, retaliation should be swift and generously administered to gain compliance. A suspect who realizes he has chosen the wrong opponent is likely to reconsider his course of action, once he is on the receiving end of physical methods. Having courage under stressful and painful conditions is part of warrior training as well.

## Education versus Experience

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Imagine a violent encounter between a highly trained martial artist and a street criminal. The martial artist has trained for ten years in the comfort of a clean and well-lit dojo designed for the practice of martial arts among like-

minded students, to perfect his art. His education encompasses nine types of kicks and six types of punches. His experience in actual combat: zero. In contrast, the street criminal has been engaged in fighting for the past three years in the ghetto environment where he plies his trade. His education: the one-two punch and kicking his opponent in the head when he is down. His experience in actual combat: invaluable. How will this encounter end?

No one can be absolutely certain of the outcome of this encounter; however, this situation illustrates the value of experience versus education. One hard-won street fight is more valuable than 10 orchestrated practice sessions for reinforcing the application of skills. Unfortunately, we cannot simply have officers invite assaults by suspects to practice their skills in the real world. Thus, ICS continually stresses realistic combat conditions to replicate the real-world experience provided by actual fighting.

Students need to recognize that experience level is difficult to gauge in an opponent until you are already engaged in combat. Appearances can be deceiving. While untrained suspects may not have training in technique, they may have the ruthlessness to carry out brutal assaults to win the fight. Never hesitate to go full contact with an opponent who has initiated combat, but recognize that, when an opponent has a higher level of skill, this presents a greater risk of defeat unless you can escalate the level of force to your advantage.

## Increased Options, Increased Reaction Time

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Many police training programs in defensive tactics focus on instilling a variety of options. Like a veritable vegetable garden of techniques, the officer is expected to pick and choose from this or that tactic with the idea that more options is better. However, it is a fact that more is *not* better when it comes to self-defense techniques.

In 1952, psychologist W. E. Hick conducted a series of experiments to assess whether there was a relationship between choices and cognitive processing (reaction) time. Hick discovered that reaction time is exponentially increased in direct proportion to the number of choices available. In other words, the more choices that are given, the longer it takes for a person to decide what to do. This maxim came to be known as Hick's law.

Bruce Siddle illustrated Hick's law in action when he demonstrated that a student with knowledge of two defensive tactics techniques showed a reactionary time that was 58 percent slower than students with knowledge of only one technique.\* ICS applies Hick's law with enthusiasm. By focusing on

\* This study is published in Bruce K. Siddle's work, *Sharpening the Warrior's Edge* (PPCT Research Publications, 1995).

the minimum number of techniques with the largest range of application, the reactionary time of the student is shortened. Truly, when a student knows only one technique to apply to a given situation, he will do what he has trained to do and do it with confidence.

## Single Motion, Many Applications

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In keeping with an understanding of Hick's law, ICS teaches one versatile tool when addressing chokes. Regardless of the direction—whether from the front, rear, or side—the tool is unchanged. Whether stationary or moving, and even when trapped against a wall, the defense is always the same: stab and turn.

The principle with the stab and turn is to not fight force with force, especially if the opponent is stronger than the officer. The officer's goal is to apply pressure on the opponent's wrist—an articulation point that cannot be strengthened, regardless of the attacker's size and overall strength. The officer can then use principles of physics and levers to break the choke.

With all choke defenses, the officer will follow these three steps: stab, turn, and counterstrike. First, the officer stabs his arm straight up, keeping his biceps by his ear, and trapping the attacker's wrist. Next, he turns to place the stabbed arm between him and the opponent, while trapping and bending the opponent's wrist between the officer's arm and neck. Lastly, counterstrike as needed.

As already established in a previous chapter, the use of the choke by a suspect is tantamount to a deadly force assault. From a legal perspective, suspects have been justifiably shot by officers under the imminently dangerous circumstance of being choked. When an officer's airway has been compromised, he must end the fight quickly. If he can get free from the assault, he will survive the incident; if he does not, he is likely to die at the hands of the suspect. Learn the defense and use it to survive this kind of assault.

## Choke Defenses: Front Choke

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First, the officer will stab his arm straight up. It is preferred if the officer uses his nongun hand, so as he turns, he maintains his weapon side away. If the officer must use his gun hand or uses this hand instinctively, he should continue without hesitation. Once the arm is raised, the officer will keep his elbow locked straight to assure the pressure is applied on the opponent's wrist.

If the officer bends his elbow, and his arm is not by the opponent's wrist, the pressure will be on the opponent's forearm, which does not bend ([Figure 4.4](#) and [Figure 4.5](#)).

The officer will turn, so that his raised hand is now between him and the opponent ([Figure 4.6](#)).



**Figure 4.4** Correct stab: Arm is straight.



**Figure 4.5** Incorrect stab: Arm is not straight and there is no pressure on the wrist.



**Figure 4.6** Turn. Placed the raised arm between the officer and the suspect.



**Figure 4.7** Drop the arm or elbow to clear the suspect's hands off the throat.

He will drop his elbow explosively, straight down, to clear the opponent's hands off his throat. As a follow-up, any strike—especially an elbow or hammer fist—directed toward the opponent's face is a recommended ICS strategy (Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8). The officer can now transition to higher force options as needed.

It is important to note that, in accordance with the ICS “no do-over” rule, always insist on students continuing the fight as it unfolds, even when they do not demonstrate perfect techniques. They should correct it on the



**Figure 4.8** Officers should disengage and transition to a higher force option when possible.



next try and not midcombat. ICS trainers are more interested in seeing students fight through and not quit than in seeing a perfectly executed defense. Trainers will often see inexperienced students stop and reset over and over again whenever mistakes are made. This pattern should be avoided at all costs.

## Rear Choke

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The initial strategy should be the same as the defense against a choke from the front. The officer will stab his nonweapon hand upward, keeping his biceps next to his ear. The officer will turn to place his arm between himself and his opponent ([Figure 4.9](#)).

Once the officer feels the choke loosen, he will drop his elbow to clear the opponent's hands from his throat. Note that due to the angle of the choke, the elbow must go down at an angle. A straight down drop angle will miss the opponent's arms. The officer will follow up with a higher force option, as needed ([Figure 4.10](#)).



**Figure 4.9** Defense against choke from behind.





**Figure 4.10** Elbow drop at an angle.

## Side Headlock Defense

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The threat presented by a headlock from the side creates a host of eventually worse circumstances. The most damaging possibility is being pushed or pulled into an unforgiving solid object, such as a brick wall. Another possibility is being punched unabashedly in the face by the suspect. Lastly, the officer may be transitioned into a choke position wherein, given a short period of time, he will lose consciousness. All of these possibilities are very unsavory, but the traumatic blow to the head, possibly causing unconsciousness, is the most dangerous of these potential outcomes.

The defense for the side headlock addresses these threats in a sequential, fluid motion. First, prevent the potential forced collision, not through resistance, but by technique. If the officer is being pulled, he should not resist, but rather he should step in a circular motion *around* the opponent, using the momentum of the pull to defeat the swing-out movement ([Figure 4.11](#)).

As the officer steps around the opponent, he must tuck his chin in to protect from strikes to the face. Tucking the chin in will expose the top of the head, which is less likely to get injured by strikes. Similar to the position officers assume when practicing a lateral vascular neck on another student, this chin tuck also will relieve some of the pressure on the throat.

The arm that is closest to the opponent will then come over the officer's shoulder, and be placed between the officer's head and the opponent's



**Figure 4.11** Side headlock defense: Step around with the attacker's pull.

face. The palm will be facing the opponent. This position presents a host of options, including a groin strike with the far hand, to force the opponent into a defensive posture (Figure 4.12).

The officer will then grab hold of the opponent's face, applying pressure at the base of the nose (Figure 4.13).

Using the head as a lever, the officer will pull the opponent's head backward and down, as the officer stands up. The officer should avoid attempting



**Figure 4.12** Side headlock: Chin tuck and groin strike.



**Figure 4.13** Pressure on the base of the nose will force the attacker to loosen up.



**Figure 4.14** Use the opponent's head as a lever to stand up.



**Figure 4.15** Takedown is an option to end this attack.

to use brute force to muscle the opponent. Instead of relying on arm strength, he should use the larger muscles of his legs and hip flexors to apply pressure to the opponent's head (Figure 4.14).

While standing up, the officer will use his far hand to grab the opponent's knee and raise the opponent's leg as he is taking him down. The officer should avoid following the opponent down to the ground and transition to another force method as needed (Figure 4.15).

## Rear Headlock Defense and Rear Naked Choke

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If a suspect is applying the rear headlock on an officer, he likely will be forced to deal with the business end of the police firearm sooner rather than later. It is crucial to remember that officers are never choked to unconsciousness merely so an offender can escape from custody. Once unconscious, these officers are usually executed with their own weapons before the offender flees (Figure 4.16).

The officer will send both hands toward the opponent's wrist across his chest and pull down on the opponent's hold. As the pull is executed, the officer will turn his chin in toward his hands (Figure 4.17).

The officer will use a rotational step to get under the opponent's armpit and escape from the hold. Next, he can transition to another force method (Figure 4.18).

If the officer does not tuck in his chin or otherwise gets stuck, he will find himself in a side headlock position, which he can address as described in an earlier section of this chapter.



**Figure 4.16** Rear headlock.



**Figure 4.17** Officer rakes the suspect's eyes to create initial space.



**Figure 4.18** Officer will pull the suspect's wrist across his chest.

If the headlock is effectively secured by the opponent, the officer must react violently and explosively, and immediately transition to higher force options. Failure to do so will result in the officer losing consciousness, due to pressure on the trachea or the carotid arteries. Thus, recognize that an opponent who executes this movement effectively is likely a student of mixed martial arts (MMA) or another martial arts discipline—a potentially formidable opponent.

When all else fails, the officer must strike, bite, stomp, or do whatever he can to get the suspect to loosen up just enough for him to tuck his chin in or insert his fingers between the suspect's arm and his own neck. Without the ability to create some space and alleviate the pressure on the officer's neck, he will be unable to continue the fight ([Figure 4.19](#)).

If the suspect's face can be reached, he should strike this vulnerable target to loosen the suspect's hold. If not, he should strike at the suspect's elbow, forcing the suspect's fingers to dislodge from the secured grip. Even if it is not completely dislodged, enough space should be created for the officer to insert his fingers and grab hold of the suspect's wrist ([Figure 4.20](#) and [Figure 4.21](#)).



**Figure 4.19** Elbow pop to release the hold.



**Figure 4.20** Officer will use a rotational step to escape the choke.



**Figure 4.21** Rear naked choke. Secured hold.



## Front Headlock Defense

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When defending against a front headlock (also called the *guillotine*), the goal is to keep the attacker's hip back, so he cannot apply the necessary pressure to choke you. The officer will begin by using his "outside" hand to grab the opponent's wrists and pulling down to create some breathing room (Figure 4.22).

The officer's "inside" hand will begin striking at the opponent's groin followed by an upwards elbow to the opponent's face. The opponent's natural reaction to a groin strike would be to bend forward, which would make the face a good secondary target (Figure 4.23).

Remember, this opponent is executing a deadly force level assault; all targets are open and fair game in this defense. The officer will strike as many times as needed until the hold is loosened. The officer will then use the striking hand to assist the outside hand in pulling/pushing the opponent's wrist down.

As space is created, the officer will use his shoulder to drive through the opponent's hold and under the opponent's arm. The officer will end in a control position or disengage and transition to higher force options (Figure 4.24).



**Figure 4.22** Creating "breathing room" for the guillotine defense.



**Figure 4.23** The inside hand is used for striking and elbows.



**Figure 4.24** Officer drives under the opponent's arm.



## Front Bear Hug Defense

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Unlike the chokes, the bear hug is not necessarily a deadly force attack. Likely the tool of a suspect who has a size advantage but no skilled training, the bear hug represents an attempt to control the arms of the officer. The greatest danger of the bear hug is the likelihood that it will lead to a tackle and subsequent ground fighting event.

A common misperception is that police officers can choose to effectively transition to ground fighting and successfully get an opponent to “submit” in an arrest situation. In fact, a ground fight is one of the worst situations in which officers can place themselves. Because of the unique equipment considerations and other factors, police officers will *always* be safer on their feet.

Like the front headlock defense, the goal is to keep the suspect’s hip back and not to allow him to use leverage to pick the officer up, which typically will be followed by a takedown. If there is no space between the officer and the suspect, the officer will initiate a groin strike, which will force the suspect’s hip back ([Figure 4.25](#)).

Once space is created, the officer will immediately place his hands (palms) against the suspect’s hips to make sure they stay back. Note that,



**Figure 4.25** A groin strike forces the attacker to move his hips back.



**Figure 4.26** Officer controls the suspect's hips.

if the arms are caught, this should be fairly simple to accomplish; however, if the arms are free, the officer may not be able to reach with both hands. The officer should attempt to place at least one hand on the suspect's hips ([Figure 4.26](#)).

The officer will follow up with counterstrikes to force the suspect to disengage. Counterstrikes may include knees, kicks, elbow strikes, or head butts. Particularly, a series of rapid combinations to disorient the suspect is recommended.

## Rear Bear Hug Defense

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As with the front defense, the goal with the rear bear hug defense is to avoid being picked up and thrown to the ground. As soon as the officer feels the suspect grabbing him, he should make his body limp, widen his stance (base), and make himself as much of a “dead weight” as possible, making lifting harder. Especially when the size difference between the officer and suspect is negligible, this strategy may entirely stop the suspect's movement ([Figure 4.27](#)).

Once the suspect has committed to the bear hug position with both arms, the officer can use multiple tools to force the suspect to let go. These include strikes, such as elbow strikes, foot stomps, uppercut kicks, and head butts. Other options are manipulating the suspect's fingers (covered in the next section) and striking the suspect's metacarpals (back of hands) to generate pain compliance ([Figure 4.28](#) to [Figure 4.30](#)).

The officer should always transition into a restraint and control position, or use a higher force option as needed.



**Figure 4.27** A strong base and the "dead weight" maneuver help the officer to stay in the fight.



**Figure 4.28** Elbow strikes to the attacker's face.



**Figure 4.29** Finger manipulation.



**Figure 4.30** Striking the suspect's metacarpals.

## Finger Manipulation Techniques

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First and foremost, it is imperative that the officer does not stop striking at the opponent to disorient him as he moves to manipulate the fingers of an attacker. If the officer begins focusing exclusively on the finger manipulation, he may lose sight of the opponent's attempts to execute a takedown. Another option available to supplement strikes and parries is finger manipulation, which can be highly effective at temporarily disabling an opponent's hands.

While simultaneously striking, one hand will travel down to the suspect's forearm toward his hand. The officer may switch hands as needed, to keep the opponent on the defensive, and to assure he traps the top hand. Once the top hand of the suspect is trapped across the metacarpals to make sure he cannot escape the technique, the officer will use the other hand to pry open one of the fingers ([Figure 4.31](#)).

It does not matter which finger is targeted, the technique will work with any and all of the opponent's fingers. Once any finger is secured, the officer will "jam" it into its base and bend it backward, creating extreme pain for the suspect and forcing him to let go of whatever hold he has on a weapon or the officer. While still maintaining a hold of the finger, the officer will then roll out and transition to a control hold or higher force option ([Figure 4.32a](#) to [Figure 4.32c](#)).



**Figure 4.31** Officer prys a finger open in order to manipulate it.



**Figure 4.32a** Officer traps a finger.



**Figure 4.32b** Finger is manipulated.



**Figure 4.32c** Officer rolls out.

## **Thrust (Defensive) Front Kick**

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Unlike the snap kick, which is delivered in an offensive manner, the front thrust kick is meant to create space between the offender and the officer, allowing the officer to transition to other tools or otherwise gain control of a situation. Thus, the target of the thrust kick is not the groin or other vital areas of the opponent.



**Figure 4.33** Thrust. A (defensive) foot kick.

To execute the thrust kick, the officer will raise his knee and shift his hip forward to generate power. The officer will make contact as high on the suspect's body as possible, targeting the torso whenever possible. Ideally, the officer should kick at this level to assure the suspect is being pushed back and not bent forward or doubled over ([Figure 4.33](#)).

Contact should be made using the whole foot, if possible. The motion should be of a pushing rather than a penetrating, nature. The purpose of the kick is to create distance, not to cause an injury to the suspect. The officer should recoil his kick as soon as possible to prevent entrapment of the leg by the suspect. Then, officers can rapidly transition to follow-up counterstrikes or other tools.

Teaching law enforcement officers to use this kick is controversial at best. Because of the nature of the profession and the appearance of brutality in use of force situations, students must be extremely careful when employing any kinds of kicks in the field. Kicking a suspect in the head when deadly force is not an option, for example, could result in a suspension or firing if the use of such techniques is poorly articulated. ICS proponents believe that the risk of facing disciplinary punishment for using a potentially misunderstood technique is worth it, if knowing how to use the technique increases the chance of surviving a dangerous encounter.



Unexpectedly, the thrust kick is repeatedly cited as an effective self-defense method when used by students in high-stress law enforcement environments. As a case in point, Deputy Smith\* was a student of ICS who subsequently found himself in a deadly force situation in 2009. After a period of initial combat with a suspect in an arrest situation, Deputy Smith was disarmed of his firearm when it came loose during the fight. The weapon came to rest between him and the suspect, who was armed with a knife. Deputy Smith used the thrust kick to the suspect's chest to create crucial space between him and the suspect. He then was able to recover the weapon and fire it before the suspect could close the distance for a third time.

## Final Commentary on Unarmed Defenses

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Unarmed defenses are the transition methods for students to survive initial confrontations until they can employ countermeasures. On the other hand, police officers do not have to endure physical abuse from offenders or get into a prolonged fistfight with them just because they *can*. They can and should quickly escalate up the force continuum to protect themselves and others from injury or assault. Teaching students to transition to a higher force option at the end of every defense maneuver is a fundamental maxim with training law enforcement students in survival techniques.

ICS recognizes that a violently executed decision to attack by one party is often the best way to win a fight in the end. It would be nice if all arrests could be made without using a show of force. The truth is that this is not the case. The officer who is unprepared to defend himself against a suspect who throws a punch or kick is asking for serious trouble. Short of using brutal methods to apprehend every last perpetrator, police officers must decide on the fly what options to use when combat begins. Defensive techniques seek to mitigate the threats posed by a suspect upon initial combat conditions.

Unless there is time to transition to another weapon before engagement, such as a baton or chemical spray in response to an apparently noncompliant subject, unarmed engagement should be quick and aggressive. Action always beats reaction, and the officer should capitalize on this when combat is initiated by others. Dispense with the preliminaries and regain control as soon as possible when a fight begins. Accomplish this by responding to an offender's attack with a quick-and-dirty defense and then a series of counterattacks until the offender complies.

\* Fictitious name.

The immediate and instinctive reaction to pain inflicted by an aggressor must become reflected in the self-defense tactics of police officers. Thus, when exposed to minor injury, officers will become unfazed by the body's pain signals and, instead, focus on regaining control of the situation. Particularly, in training students to defend against an opponent's strikes, fighting through pain is germane to the experience of the warrior. It is the first step in surviving a violent incident and drills that reinforce pain survival and response are inoculations in and of themselves.





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# Blunt Weapons Defense

# 5

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## Introduction

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It is a beautiful summer day. A major league baseball player steps up to home plate in a filled-to-capacity stadium. He gets into position, a Louisville Slugger® grasped confidently in both hands. The pitched ball hurtles toward him at 80 miles per hour. He shifts his weight behind the bat's momentum, steps, and swings it forward with maximum force. The bat connects solidly with the ball, giving a satisfying THWACK as it heads outward, firing toward the spectators in the stands. Satisfied, he shuffles away from home plate for his victory lap around the bases.

In law enforcement, contact with a blunt weapon *du jour* would go a little differently. A ruthless thug steps up to an encounter with the police and brandishes a stick, tire iron, or bat. Instead of connecting with a ball, he lines up the bat with your head, swings and connects with maximum force. Best case scenario is that you lose consciousness and the thug runs away into the night. The worst case is that you hemorrhage out from a brain bleed and die. Like the home run hero, the suspect still makes a victory lap. Only this time, instead of making a lap around the bases, he parades through the criminal underworld with your firearm, celebrating his newfound status as a cop killer. Not a good day.

Gang members, teens, protesters, the mentally ill, and other combative subjects may choose to use a blunt weapon when resisting police officers. These weapons are often gathered spontaneously from the environment. A domestic violence arrest turns bad when a suspect picks up a curtain rod or club to fight officers trying to remove him from his home. A traffic stop turns violent when an offender reaches into the bed of his truck for a scrap of lumber or sledge hammer from the job site. A police officer is disarmed and beaten with his PR-24 (police baton) during a riot.

Blunt weapons also may be items with which a combatant has trained. Certain martial arts disciplines train with long sticks, staffs, or nunchaku.\* Even untrained opponents, enamored of Hollywood-style violence and exotic weaponry, may deploy these armaments in a confrontation with police (Figure 5.1). Whatever the circumstances, blunt weapons can cause serious harm if officers are unskilled in defeating these weapons. This chapter will outline specific defense tactics and take-away methods for blunt weapons.

\* Nunchaku are two smaller sticks connected with a chain or rope, commonly referred to as "nunchucks."



**Figure 5.1** The blunt weapon defense requires special techniques.

## Mechanics of Circular Motion

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Physics teaches us that an object traveling in a circular motion, such as a bat being swung, will generate substantial centrifugal force. Although different variables (such as inertia and the length of the object) dictate the actual net force generated, what is important about circular motion is that it causes major injuries to the human target. Being on the receiving end of an accelerating, blunt force trauma will be highly unpleasant and potentially deadly.

Newtonian law tells us that the majority of the force generated will be found at the tip of the object that is moving. Therefore, if a regulation-sized, 42-inch bat is used in a circular strike trajectory, the majority of the force generated will be concentrated within the last two inches of the bat. In plain language, this means the worst part of the bat to be struck with is the tip. The good news is that, if you can avoid being struck by that crucial two inches of a blunt object, you can easily recover and win the fight.

## Blunt Objects Primer

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Remember, a blunt object can take the form of any number of common items: bats, pipes, crowbars, chains, tire irons, wooden weapons, or any number of improvised items. Officers have been assaulted with car parts, telephone pole components, mops and brooms, sledgehammers, and many other variations. For our purposes, a blunt object can be defined as any long object employed in a combat situation that does not have an edge to it. A weapon that has

an edge—whether it is an improvised, prison-made “shiv,” a hunting knife, machete, sword, or other item—is *not* considered a blunt weapon. Edged weapon defense is addressed in Chapter 6.

## Avoiding the Tip

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Primarily, the most immediate concern in blunt weapon defense is the need for the officer to avoid getting hit by the tip of the object. This can be best accomplished by using one of two simple, yet opposing, strategies: (1) closing the gap or (2) increasing the distance. Once committed to one strategy or the other, it must be a movement that is executed quickly and confidently. Hesitation increases the risk that your body or head will absorb the impact of that critical two inches of striking surface from the tip of the blunt weapon.

A degree of pain is to be expected with the blunt weapon defense, but the well-trained warrior is unfazed by this eventuality. Recognize that defending against a blunt object represents a lower risk of serious injury or death than other weapons, due to the visibility of the weapon, and the telegraphing motion required to use it effectively. These qualities make identification of the blunt weapon threat and reaction to counter an easier task than that of an edged weapon, for instance.

However, any blunt object can still present a deadly force situation and should be treated as such. If a blunt object can connect with the right target, it can be fatal. Therefore, the Israeli Combat System (ICS) teaches that, once a blunt weapon defense is used, the officer should always disengage and transition to a higher force option as needed. In cases where disengagement requires an intermediary strategy of defense, the methods described in this chapter will allow the officer to gain distance and time to transition.

Attacks with blunt objects are typically deployed in one of two ways: overhand and “baseball” swings. The overhand swings are usually executed with shorter objects, such as bottles, short sticks, and metal pipes. This is a smashing, downward movement that utilizes the large abdominal and back muscles to generate force in an arc, originating over the suspect’s head, usually toward the head of a frontal opponent. In contrast to the overhand swing, “baseball” swings will often be executed using longer blunt objects.

When discussing combat positions, it is imperative to note the positions of the attacker and the officer. When the officer is facing the suspect, this is considered the *live side* defense. In contrast, a defense executed from the side or behind the suspect is the *dead side* defense.

## Overhand Attack Defense

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Overhand attacks can be addressed using an outside defense, such as that used against an edged weapon, addressed in detail in Chapter 6. In this case, the officer uses his arm to “strike” at the suspect’s wrist in order to defuse the force of the incoming attack. Thus, in addition to blocking the attack, the block itself becomes a counterstrike aimed to cause temporary, debilitating injury to the suspect, with the added benefit of stopping the aggressive attack. The elbow should be at 90 degrees to prevent the suspect’s weapon from sliding down and making contact with the officer (Figure 5.2).

A significant disadvantage to using the outside defense to counter a *long* blunt object (like a billiards cue) is the possibility that the officer’s defending arm may be fractured. However, depending on the circumstances, sometimes sustaining a fractured arm is preferable to the alternative—a lethal blow to the officer’s head. In contrast, a short, blunt object does not generate the same degree of accelerating force; thus, due to the force differential involved, a block of a smaller object (like a club) might cause little or no injury.

Whatever the weapon, the block is always done with the primary target of the suspect’s wrist. In Hollywood versions of the blunt weapon defense, the hero usually grabs onto the blunt object and struggles over the item; this approach is going to be totally ineffective. In addition to tying up one or both of the officer’s hands and leaving him open to a firearm grab or other attack, it is extremely difficult to stop centrifugal forward motion and then just muscle your way through a weapon takeaway. Technique is critical.



**Figure 5.2** The overhead blunt weapon attack

It is important to note that making contact with the blunt object itself is not the desired outcome. In keeping with the hard-on-soft principle discussed in Chapter 3, the ideal block would involve the use of the hard forearm bones of the officer. Thus, the ulna and radius of the officer's arm work against the softer joint area of the suspect's wrist.

When the officer recognizes that the suspect is about to strike with a blunt object in an overhead manner, he should square his body to the suspect and bring his hands to his chest, forming the shape of a spear. With the spear form forward, assuring his elbows are tucked in, the officer will lean into the attacker, driving his body forward and using the spear to redirect the swing.\*

The outside defense can be made to the live side or dead side of the suspect. The crucial movement of this defense is the elbow tuck. Failure to tuck the elbows in will create an angle against the swing and may cause debilitating injury to the officer's arms (Figure 5.3a and Figure 5.3b).

Next, the officer will wrap the arm closest to the blunt object around the suspect's arm, and use his other arm to deliver a brachial stun and assume a side control position. The officer will then deliver as many counterstrikes as needed and use a "push-pull" motion to disarm the suspect (Figure 5.4a and Figure 5.4b).



**Figure 5.3a** Live side redirection.



**Figure 5.3b** Dead side redirection.

\* If the defense is executed from the dead side, the officer can follow the spearing motion into an arm-bar takedown.



**Figure 5.4a** Proper spear defense.



**Figure 5.4b** Side control position.

## **“Baseball” Swing Defense**

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As an initial strategy, avoidance of the blow altogether by increasing the distance between the officer and the suspect is one sound option. If executed well, the officer can immediately disengage and transition to a higher use of force option.

The second strategy is aggressive engagement of the suspect by closing the distance. With this choice, the goal is to move in as close as possible to the attacker to avoid the tip of the weapon. First, however, a brief commentary on the relationship between distance and officer safety is needed to illustrate the principle of this defense.

Law enforcement defensive tactics training often postulates that more distance is inherently better. However, there are exceptions; for example, when firing on a target, is it easier to hit a target from 5 yards or 25 yards? In the case of the blunt weapon defense, a closer degree of distance to the suspect minimizes the damage that can be done with the weapon. As the key concern with blunt weapons is the accelerating trauma and contact with the tip of the weapon, closing the distance eliminates this potential outcome. Likewise, as one or both of the offender's hands are occupied with his own weapon, retention of the firearm during a close quarters encounter is less of an issue.

Once the officer has closed the gap, he should blade his body so his back is exposed to the blunt object's arcing motion. In this position, if the officer does not get in close enough to avoid impact, the force will be distributed along the larger muscles and structure of the officer's back, minimizing the potential serious injuries that can occur with contact with another body part.





**Figure 5.5** The officer's bladed body position protects his vital organs

Once bladed, the officer will drop the arm closest to his opponent, and straighten it tightly against his body to protect his arm from making contact with the weapon first. Think of the arm as a wooden  $2 \times 4$ , protecting the ribcage. This movement acts as a defense to the vital organs of the torso and ribs (Figure 5.5). The other arm will come up and across to protect the face from additional strikes the opponent may deliver.

Once bladed and protected the officer will move in to get as close to the opponent's weapon-side shoulder as possible. The officer will then trap the swinging arm using the closer hand and use the other arm to strike at the opponent. Employ multiple strikes at the opponent's vital areas; for example, a brachial stun is ideal in this situation. The officer will continue to strike until it is safe for him to attempt a weapon takeaway or to disengage and transition to a higher force option as needed (Figure 5.6a to Figure 5.6d).



**Figure 5.6a** Push-pull motion into side control



**Figure 5.6b** Control the suspect and the weapon.





**Figure 5.6c** A blunt object can be used by the officer once he has disarmed the suspect.



**Figure 5.6d** Creating space and accessing higher force options are preferred.

## Final Commentary on Blunt Weapon Defense

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A baseball bat or other long object in the hands of a skilled opponent can cause devastating injuries. Although many officers fear making contact with edged weapons, blunt weapons also present significant risks of serious injury and death. Whether spontaneously found in a home or public place, blunt weapons are everywhere and can be used effectively by even unskilled adversaries.

The blunt weapon is difficult to conceal well and almost impossible to use surreptitiously. It has a characteristic set of motions associated with its use: the overhead smash or the sideways swing. Either way, it is going to be a visible, telegraphing motion, unless an officer is incapacitated or totally unaware of his environment.

Engagement with an enemy often results in injuries, both large and small. The crucial strategy in dealing with blunt weapons is the avoidance of the outermost two inches of surface area. At the widest angle of the arc generated by the swing of a blunt weapon lies the greatest danger. Therefore, if an officer can close or widen the gap between himself and the offender, he will survive the incident. Through a strategy of strike, debilitate, and disarm, the officer will prevail against the wielder of a blunt weapon in a street encounter.



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# Edged Weapons Defense

# 6

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## Introduction

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A blade in the hands of any adversary is a fearsome weapon. As a result, edged weapons represent one of the most dangerous threats to any law enforcement officer. Any attack with an edged weapon is a potentially deadly assault, which has one preferred strategy: the use of deadly force to stop the threat.

There are various schools of thought regarding fighting an opponent armed with an edged weapon. However, some truths about facing an edged weapon are universal. When fighting an opponent armed with a knife, you *will* get cut. Thus, the goal is to mitigate the effectiveness of the opponent's attack. Good damage control means minimizing the amount of contact with the edged weapon, and restricting the location of those contacts to nonvital areas.

## Twenty-One Feet: Enough Distance?

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In the 1970s, a study done by Calibre Press® suggested that the *minimum safe distance for an officer facing an edged weapon attack was 21 feet* (Figure 6.1a and 6.1b). Most officers who have been trained in the past quarter-century in the United States have seen the videos of this famous demonstration. During this video, an officer stood facing the opponent. When the stopwatch began, the suspect, holding a training knife in plain view, ran toward the officer and attempted to stab or slash him before he could draw from the holster and fire.

One aspect of the Calibre Press study is particularly important for our purposes and that is that during this demonstration, the officer knew he was about to be attacked with a knife. Because the opponent held it in plain view and the officer knew what the planned evolution of action was, he merely had to execute the draw-and-fire action using muscle memory. Accordingly, the reactionary gap caused by perception and processing delay was significantly reduced. Further complications ensue with the addition of real-life factors, such as a Level III retention holster, darkened conditions of a street or alleyway, and perception delay.

Even if the officer *could* fire a fatal volley of rounds—on time and on target—before the suspect reached him with the knife, forward momentum would continue to carry the suspect toward the officer. The suspect would not simply fall down in his tracks once he was shot by the officer. In the Hollywood version of violence, bad guys immediately fall to the ground once they are



**Figure 6.1a** 21 feet.



**Figure 6.1b** Is 21 feet enough?

shot, killed instantly, usually with one shot. In reality, suspects committed to a violent course of action will continue to fight and win confrontations, even once they are mortally wounded by an officer's rounds.\* Remember: just because you shoot the knife-armed suspect does not mean he will not still try to take you with him. He may still be able to deploy his weapon effectively, close up, even if he sustains multiple gunshot wounds.

In the real world of police work, 21 feet is not nearly enough distance for stopping an edged weapon. In fact, a minimum of 30 to 35 feet is needed to effectively draw and fire at the suspect who is motivated and prepared to use an edged weapon against an officer. Yet, how often do you maintain a distance of 30 feet away from a suspect you are interviewing or arresting?

Thus, officers need an edged weapon defense that is effective at both damage control and minimizing contact. Of course, the best option is to

\* The ability to fight through a death blow holds true for police officers, as well. When Trooper Mark Coates of the South Carolina Highway Patrol was shot in the heart on a traffic stop in 1992, he fought through an irreversibly fatal wound for several minutes before succumbing to his wounds. In contrast, the suspect survived five bullet wounds to the chest from Coates' .357 revolver. He is serving life in prison.

escalate to the firearm. Barring that choice, a good edged weapon defense will diminish the injuries sustained and, perhaps, save your life.

## Defending against Edged Weapons: Basic Concepts

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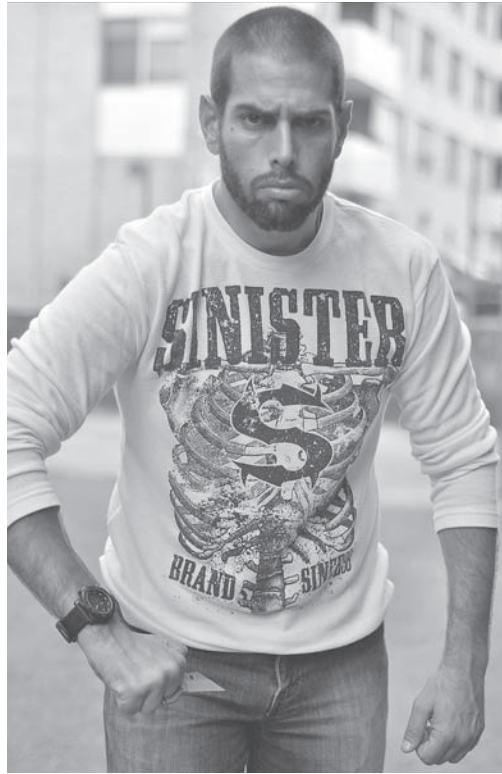
Most knife attacks are not obvious or telegraphed attacks. An edged weapon can be gripped and easily concealed in the hand, pocket, or other small area. Smaller edged weapons, such as razor blades, can be deployed almost invisibly (Figure 6.2a to Figure 6.2g).

Whatever the weapon, the officer cannot risk the lag time involved with having a different defense for empty hand attacks and edged weapons. His innate training in defense should be effective against all kinds of attacks.

Many officers who have been stabbed report the same experience—they never even saw the knife. Often, survivors of edged weapon attacks say that a stab felt like a punch. The officer does not realize he is stabbed until *after* the fight is over.



**Figure 6.2a** The suspect reaches for a knife suspended from a hidden neck chain, while carrying a second knife clipped to his waistband.



**Figure 6.2b** The concealed knife is deployed.



**Figure 6.2c** The 2-inch blade is secured in the suspect's fist and can pose a serious threat to the officer.

Generally speaking, a stab is more dangerous than a slash. Due to possible damage to internal organs and blood vessels, the stab and its accompanying penetrating trauma is a highly effective attack. Some exceptions do apply. For example, when the target is a highly vulnerable area like the neck, a slash can be particularly deadly when it severs the carotid artery.



**Figure 6.2d** By using a reverse grip for concealment, the suspect can quickly deploy the blade.



**Figure 6.2e** The reverse grip is favored by experienced knife fighters.

The Israeli Combat System (ICS) considers emerging intelligence when designing new training drills for edged weapons. Some commentators might ask: What can be new about using edged weapons against law enforcement? Increasing events of gang-related violence and terrorism worldwide provide valuable insight into novel tactics, if we listen to the personnel who survive these attacks. For example, an emerging tactic used by terrorists in Israel involves the specific targeting of the inner thigh and, by inclusion, the femoral artery of police officers with a palmed knife. In this way, a kneeling suspect who appears initially compliant can inflict massive damage and even





**Figure 6.2f** Knife deployment is stealthy.



**Figure 6.2g** ... and fast.

death with a precision strike to this vital area. We must heed the lessons these kinds of scenarios provide and countertrain for these circumstances, so that they do not become effective antipolice strategies on our watch.

When edged weapons are involved, an attempt to disarm is typically a futile effort. The likelihood is that the knife will be dropped before the defensive maneuver is completed. In addition, the time needed and the diversion of attention from the opponent himself to the knife alone may prove fatal. The officer is far better off disengaging and transitioning to higher force options, as needed.

In the coming sections, we will examine the various types of edged weapon attacks and how to cope with them. All of the defenses are designed to take advantage of the natural human reflex—the “flinch” motion—to minimize damage and win the fight.

## Overhand Stab Defense

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Like the overhand blunt weapon attack discussed in Chapter 5, the overhand stab is an obvious flexing motion of the suspect wielding a knife over his head, moving in an arc toward the head or upper body of the officer. The officer may not see the actual knife, but is unlikely to miss the obvious telegraphing motion of the overhead attack. If the officer does sense the attack, the flinch response will be the first natural reflex. Thus, initially, the officer should address the attack as he would any other outside strike, with an outside defense (Figure 6.3a).

As with other defense movements, the importance of the 90-degree angle at the elbow to prohibit the edged weapon from sliding down and into the officer's torso is crucial. Once the initial defense is successful, the officer must counterattack as violently as possible to assume control over the situation. This is no time for careful consideration. It is time for violent and immediate action.



**Figure 6.3a** An outside attack and a counterstrike should be the initial steps in addressing a knife attack.



**Figure 6.3b** Driving the opponent's arm back will minimize his strength.



**Figure 6.3c** Side control is effective in controlling the edged weapon.

As soon as possible, the officer will gain control over the suspect's wrist pushing it behind his shoulder to remove the option of struggling with the suspect's larger pectoral muscles. When executed well, the officer will only face the resistance of the smaller rotator cuff muscles ([Figure 6.3b](#)).

The officer will use his other hand to assume a side control position ([Figure 6.3c](#)) and deliver as many counterstrikes as needed—using punches or other moves—to neutralize the threat and assure the suspect is no longer

resisting. The officer will then use a circular motion to bring the suspect's hand in front of his chest and push it against him, creating space. Lastly, the officer should smoothly transition to his firearm as he tactically moves to offset and assume a position of advantage (Figure 6.3d to 6.6f).



**Figure 6.3d** Counterstrikes are important to make the suspect drop his knife.



**Figure 6.3e** Disengaging is a better option than disarming.



**Figure 6.3f** Escalation to a higher force option is a must.

## Underhand Stab Defense

The underhand attack involves the use of an edged weapon that travels in an upward-swinging arc from a lower to higher point. This attack may originate from behind a suspect's thigh, rear pocket, or waistband. In the case of a butterfly or tactical folding knife, it may be part of the fluid movement of deploying the knife for use; the natural movement is to flip the weapon outward or downward and then utilize it.

In much the same way as the overhand stab defense, the defense against the underhand stab is yet another extension of the flinch response and outside defense used against any strike. Once the officer recognizes the edged weapon, he will drive his blocking hand under the attacker's armpit and use it to trap the attacker's arm. The officer's other hand will control the attacker using a side control position (Figure 6.4a and Figure 6.4b).

The officer will then slide the hand of the arm controlling the weapon toward his own shoulder, forcing a stronger hold on the attacker's wrist. Next, the officer will deliver as many counterstrikes as needed to neutralize the threat and assure the suspect is no longer resisting (Figure 6.4c, Figure 6.4d, and Figure 6.4e).

When ready to disengage, the officer will push the attacker away and transition to the firearm, as he tactically moves to offset and assume a position of advantage.



**Figure 6.4a** Again, outside defense and simultaneous counter are the initial reflexive defense.



**Figure 6.4b** The officer gets immediate control of the knife-holding arm.





**Figure 6.4c** The officer secures the hold on the knife while assuming a side control position.



**Figure 6.4d** The officer counterstrikes.



**Figure 6.4e** The officer disengages and transitions to a higher force option.

## Forward Stab Defense

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In the forward stab, an opponent is using an edged weapon held more or less parallel to the ground, usually targeting the belly or torso of the officer in a straightforward motion. In this case, the routine block will not work. A redirection, or parry, is needed. When parrying, the officer will use his forearm to redirect the forward motion of the attacker. By keeping the elbow down and sweeping across the body, the officer can move the attacker's fist, arm, or edged weapon out of play. The presence of the knife does not affect the officer's initial parry, but will affect the follow-up steps.



**Figure 6.5a** A parry is the best way to address a forward stab attack.



**Figure 6.5b** Offsetting the body will increase the attacker's margin of error.

The initial parry action can be repeated as many times as needed. Theoretically, the officer could simultaneously use his other hand to draw and fire at the suspect. At such close range, the officer will gain a significant advantage through the use of the firearm, but a safe and effective draw and fire would be risky at best. A better option would be to strike, disengage, and then transition to the firearm. If an immediate transition to the firearm is not a viable option, the officer should use his parrying hand to trap the attacker's wrist, using a hooking motion.

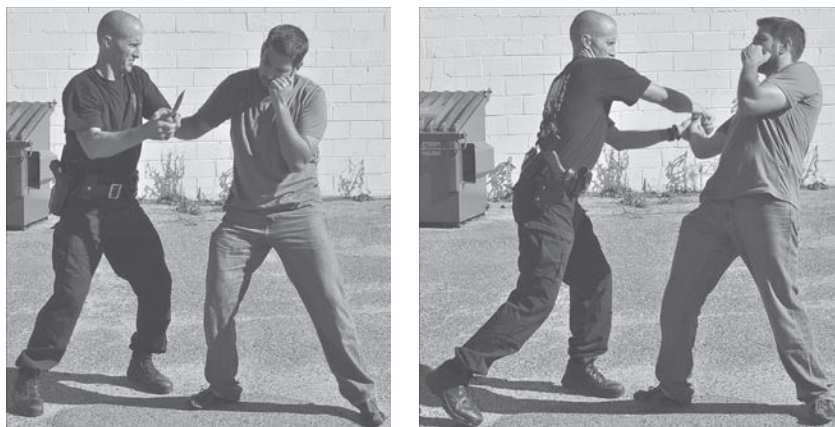
The officer will then counterstrike as a distraction, as he simultaneously brings the attacker's hand around in a wrist-twist motion. The officer will continue the wrist twist until the suspect is down on the ground (Figure 6.5a to Figure 6.5f).



**Figure 6.5c** Counterstriking will allow the officer to gain control of the fight.



**Figure 6.5d** Control the knife and keep the elbow down to avoid a slash by the attacker.



**Figure 6.5e,f** Once the attacker is disoriented, a wrist twist will take him down.

Properly executed, it is common for the students to become overly focused on the suspect's weapon during the wrist twist, seeking to dislodge and take up the weapon. If the weapon comes loose, that is a bonus; however, it is not the true goal of this movement. Disarming the suspect is secondary to gaining distance and transitioning to the firearm. Thus, whether or not the suspect is still holding the knife at the conclusion of the move, the officer should disengage, create space, and transition to higher force options as needed.

## Slash Defense

A slash attack is executed through a side-to-side motion, with the knife-point generally parallel to the ground or up to a 45-degree angle. The Hollywood version of the slash attack usually depicts the suspect as ambidextrous, passing the knife from hand to hand; this is rarely the reality. Although the slash offense may be more intimidating in appearance, it actually represents an easier scenario to manage, due to the large motion and visibility of the edged weapon.

As with the other defenses, the flinch response is once again the guiding technique. First, the officer will raise both hands to block the oncoming slash attempt (Figure 6.6a).

The officer will keep his forearms perpendicular to the ground to prevent the knife from sliding down the arms towards his torso (Figure 6.6b). If the attacker uses a live side attack, the officer's forearms should make contact with the attacker's wrist and just below the elbow. Although often a choice





**Figure 6.6a** The officer uses a flinch response to address a live side slash.



**Figure 6.6b** Counterstrike and continue as if the attacker is trying an overhead stab.



**Figure 6.7a** The officer uses a flinch response on a dead side slash attack.



**Figure 6.7b** The officer transitions to an armbar, a good option in this scenario.

target, in this case striking solely at the elbow may bend the opponent's arm, inadvertently making it easier for him to cut the officer. The hand closest to the wrist of the suspect will grab hold of the suspect's wrist as the officer's other hand continues into a brachial stun or other counterstrike. The officer will then continue as if it was an overhand stab attack: violent counterattack, gain distance, and transition to firearm as needed.

If the attacker used a dead side attack, the officer's forearms should make contact on both sides of the elbow, creating a hyperextension of the attacker's elbow, using the attacker's own momentum against him. If the attacker used a dead side attack, the officer will transition into an arm bar, another take-down, or other countermeasures. The officer should disengage and transition to a higher force option as needed (Figure 6.7a, and Figure 6.7b).

## Knife to the Throat: Front Defense

In cases where an officer is being taken hostage, the cardinal rule is to never give up your firearm to a suspect. An offender who disarms you will use your firearm to kill you, so resistance is the only option. When facing a potential knife wound to the throat, the officer's purposeful action must beat the reaction of the suspect. The initial goal of this defense is to create as much space between the edged weapon and the trachea or carotid arteries as possible.

Using an explosive motion, the officer will place one hand on top of the attacker's elbow, and the other hand just above it. Using both hands, the officer will press the elbow down and inward toward his own navel creating a lever and pulling the knife away from his throat. Simultaneously, the officer will press his chest out, increasing the margin of error for a hastily executed attack by the suspect ([Figure 6.8a](#) to [Figure 6.8b](#)).

In cases where an officer has been placed against a wall, a higher risk of injury is present. However, if there is space available, the officer also should move his head back to increase the space between the knife and throat.



**Figure 6.8a** The attacker holds a knife against the officer's throat.



**Figure 6.8b** With an explosive collapse of the elbow and a forward chest press, the officer will move the blade away from her body.



**Figure 6.8c** The officer counterstrikes while controlling the knife.



**Figure 6.8d** The officer disengages and transitions to a higher force option.

Counterstrike aggressively to neutralize the threat, disengage, and transition to a higher force option, as needed ([Figure 6.8c](#) and [Figure 6.8d](#)).

## Knife to the Throat: Rear Defense

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An extremely high-risk situation presents itself when a suspect gains a hold on an officer from behind (rear headlock) and places a knife against the officer's throat. The natural, flinch reflex of the officer would be to bring his

hands up to the threat. Using his hands to pull at the attacker's wrist, the officer will create the initial space between the knife and the throat. A significant risk exists for the officer to miss the suspect's wrist and grab the blade instead (Figure 6.9a and Figure 6.9b).\*

As the officer is pulling the attacker's hands down and across his own chest, he will immediately tuck his chin in. Using the shoulder closer to the attacker, the officer will strike creating additional space. The officer will use an "L" step with his inside leg to step under the attacker's armpit (Figure 6.9a to Figure 6.9e).

Once out, the officer will transition to a takedown, counterstrikes, or disengage and transition to higher force options as needed.



**Figure 6.9a** The attacker holds a knife to the officer's throat.



**Figure 6.9b** An explosive pull is necessary to move the blade away from the vital organs.

\* However painful it may be to cut your fingers on a blade held to your throat, it is a better alternative to having your throat slashed.





**Figure 6.9c** The officer steps under the attacker's arm.



**Figure 6.9d** The officer should disengage ...



**Figure 6.9e** ... and transition to a higher force option.

## Final Commentary on Edged Weapons Defense

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Knives are the most readily available weapons of choice. Statistically, firearms are the most dangerous weapons for law enforcement officers to face in the field; however, edged weapons are accessible in most settings: in homes, public places like restaurants and bars, vehicles, and clothing pockets. Thus, by sheer statistics, the chance of a confrontation with an edged weapon is much higher than that of facing a firearm.

In the past 30 years, police combat experience has shown that 21 feet is not an adequate distance for safe engagement of a determined suspect armed with a knife. In any case, law enforcement officers rarely operate in the realm of space greater than 21 feet of distance with any dangerous suspect. Felony traffic stops and domestic violence arrests are not made via long distance. It simply is not possible to make an arrest and handcuff a subject from 30 feet away.

**Note:** The armed opponent who chooses to use a knife will not simply attempt one slash or stab and then give up. When the edged weapon comes into play, expect an entire range of attacks—both stabs and slashes—from any suspect. Focusing on controlling the armed assailant's arm, and not the weapon itself, and a combination of violent counterstrikes, disengagement and transition to the firearm is the key to success. Facing an edged weapon attack is a survivable encounter. Through maximizing the natural flinch response to attack described in this chapter, officers may get cut, but they will not get killed.

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# Handgun Defenses

# 7

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## Introduction

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As police officers, we must recognize the fact that at every encounter there is at least one handgun present—yours. Whether you are on a call for service, traffic stop, or other street encounter, it is a potentially lethal situation because of the equipment you carry to the scene. And, if your handgun can be taken away, either from the holster or from your hands, it most likely will be used against you.

Any suspect who threatens an officer with a handgun shows the intent and the means to cause severe bodily harm to the officer and should be addressed with extreme prejudice. Although every police department has its own use of force regulations, one guideline is always clear: A handgun equals the potential for deadly force. Case law supports police officers who use deadly force against suspects armed with handguns, even when the suspect's handgun is later found to be unloaded or not functional.

There are many options to address the threat of a handgun. Regardless of technique, some truths are held as universal. In this chapter, we will explore the basic rules of handgun defenses and explore the methods for surviving this worst-case scenario.

## Basic Rules of Handgun Defenses

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### Rule #1: Get Out of the Line of Fire

Redirection should always be the first step. If you cannot avoid being shot, you cannot execute the majority of handgun defenses. The serious, penetrating wound caused by a projectile will significantly complicate your ability to fight and survive.

While it is possible to fight through and survive gunshot wounds, it is not a negligible injury. Contrary to Hollywood-style depictions, gunshot wounds are often debilitating and painful. A bullet to an extremity, like an arm or leg, may completely disable an officer. A bullet to the chest can mean death in two or three minutes.

In order of priority, after avoiding the shots that are fired, muzzle awareness becomes the imperative mission. You will want to remain *in control* of the firearm, but not get tunnel vision *about* the firearm. You do



this by assuming a side control position and using violence of action to disarm the suspect.

## **Rule #2: Always Keep Fighting**

In whatever technique you execute during a critical incident, what is important is the level of force with which you execute your defense. It does not matter whether or not your defense is “pretty,” if your body is slightly out of alignment, or it is less than perfect. What matters is that you always keep fighting.

Even if you do sustain a bullet wound, you can continue to fight. In fact, you *must* do so. No matter how badly the technique has been “messed up” or how much pain you feel, we say again: *You always keep fighting until you win.*

## **Rule #3: Fight the Suspect, Not the Weapon**

Too many handgun defenses become hyperfocused on the weapon itself and not the fight. When you commit yourself completely to the reacquisition of the handgun, you miss the opportunity to do serious damage to your opponent. Remember that you are fighting the suspect and not the weapon. If the handgun falls or otherwise becomes dislodged during a fight, you do not simply let go of the suspect. You must follow through to prevent his further aggressive actions against you even though you have defeated his firearm. Additionally, when other suspects are present during a struggle over a handgun, a loose weapon may become a valuable commodity to the unarmed. Respond accordingly.\*

## **Physiology of Human Response**

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In reviewing edged weapons defense from Chapter 6, recall that action *always* beats reaction. Thus, a suspect armed with a knife can close the distance of 21 feet and cut you before you can draw your gun from the holster and fire. Likewise, when the officer is initiating a defense, he is racing against the clock of action–reaction; the contrast between his own aggressive action and the reactionary delay of the suspect. Two variables come into play:

- How long will it take the suspect to recognize that an action (defense) is being made and react to it?
- Will it be long enough to allow you the fractions of a second to gain control over the situation?

\* The strategy to cope with this possibility is simple: Always be armed with your own firearm, just in case.

A skilled opponent will have a quicker response to the action–reaction dilemma, as he has gained proficiency over the depth and breadth of experience. You must become that skilled opponent so that the suspect’s reaction is immediately apparent to you. Like teaching police recruits to anticipate the threats posed by hands in pockets, police officers need to become more aware of the typical suspect maneuvers and have a plan for managing them.

The human eye is designed to detect motion and light and naturally draw the eyes directly toward an opponent’s movement. Thus, keeping movement to a minimum is imperative. Large, telegraphing motions will be easily recognized by the opponent and quickly countered. Use the vulnerability of the human eye to your advantage. Similar foreground and background images make it difficult to detect movement. For example, an officer facing a handgun may be told:

Put your hands up.

Most suspects will not be more specific. However, by raising his arms to about chest height and in front of his body, the officer will keep his frame smaller and movement harder to detect.

When performing handgun defenses and disarms, you should use physics to your advantage. Many suspects are larger or stronger than the officers they confront. Attempts to muscle an armed assailant may fail if the opponent is larger, stronger, or on performance-enhancing drugs. You can instead depend on fulcrum points and levers to increase your advantage.

The field of strategic business decision making promotes a simple philosophy: Always act to keep as many of your options open as possible. By intentionally minimizing the opponent’s advantage while appearing to cooperate earnestly, you set the stage for a surprise countermeasure that can be more effective than a telegraphed defense.

## **The Psychology of Effective Defense**

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Psychology also plays a part in the timing and initiating of a successful defense. Know this. The weapon is the source of confidence to the suspect, so it is safe to assume that the suspect will fight for that gun with all his might for fear of losing it.

Using verbal cues to calm or distract the opponent may be valuable when preparing to initiate a defense. A suspect uses one part of his brain to interpret speech and respond verbally, while another part of the brain controls the weapon. This is one reason that police train to use verbal commands when executing defensive tactics. “Stop resisting” is said when executing strikes to train the officer’s brain to do both concurrently, as it does not come naturally. For the suspect, this practiced activity is not the case.

Physical subterfuge can be effective as well. For example, when an officer is told to move the arms (as in the “hands up” example), the suspect is expecting a movement from the officer. So, give him one, but not the one he expects. This can be a good opportunity to execute a defense because the reaction time for the suspect will be longer.

For the purposes of discussion in this chapter, we will assume the officer is armed. Therefore, whenever possible, each defense should end with the officer off-setting and drawing his firearm. If the officer cannot access his own firearm or he does not have one, he can use the handgun taken from the suspect.\*

## Front Handgun Defense

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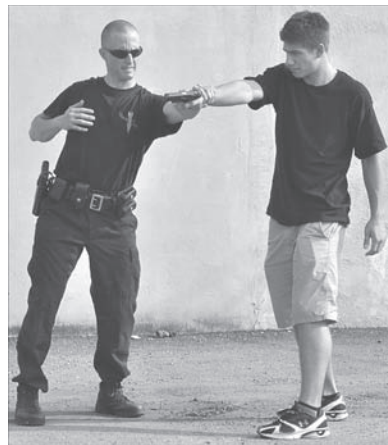
The front handgun defense can be used when standing face to face with an armed suspect (Figure 7.1a). As with all handgun defenses, the top priority of the front handgun defense is the immediate threat: the muzzle. Once out of the line of fire, the officer must continue to ensure he remains out of the line of fire.

Although either hand can be used, tactical positioning will largely dictate which one should be used. Whenever possible, the officer should use the same-side hand to redirect the muzzle. First, the officer will send his hand under in an upward motion, avoiding a large movement, to the opponent’s wrist (Figure 7.1b).

Next, the officer will position himself to drive his waist/ribcage area into the suspect’s arm, forcing a hyperextension of the joint and a subsequent arm-bar position (Figure 7.2).



**Figure 7.1a** Gun threat to the front.



**Figure 7.1b** Redirection of the assailant's arm while offsetting will increase the margin of error.

\* When using a suspect's handgun, always assume a malfunction is present. Use a “tap and rack” motion to ready the weapon immediately after performing a successful takeaway.



**Figure 7.2** Control the handgun by using an armbar.



**Figure 7.3a** The officer grabs the handgun with his free hand.



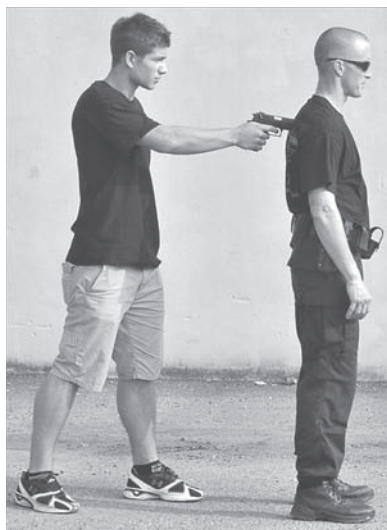
**Figure 7.3b** A rotational movement is used to disarm the suspect.

Next, the officer's other hand will secure the handgun by grasping the barrel, making sure the thumb is up (Figure 7.3a). Lastly, the officer will then use his whole body to rotate toward the suspect, as he drives the handgun (muzzle side) toward the general direction of the opponent's groin and down (Figure 7.3b).

The officer should then secure the weapon and draw his own, if possible.

## Rear Handgun Defense

The basic handgun defense principles remain the same with the rear handgun defense. In this case, an officer is being confronted from the rear by an armed assailant. In some cases, the handgun may actually be pressed against the officer's body (Figure 7.4a).



**Figure 7.4a** Handgun threat from the rear.

Initially, the officer should try to identify which of the suspect's hands holds the handgun. The environment should be used whenever possible to facilitate this discovery. The use of incidental reflective surfaces, such as car mirrors, plate glass windows, or other items of opportunity, can assist an officer in viewing the threat more clearly.

Once initially confronted, the officer should use the expected reaction of a simple turning head movement to turn and see how the suspect holds the handgun. By feigning stupidity and disbelief, a common response, the officer can get a quick look at the weapon and plan accordingly. In reality, this simple peek is highly important to the planning of the successful defense. The officer's highest risk would be to plan to address an extended hand position when, in fact, the handgun is actually held in a tucked position in the suspect's other hand.

Once the weapon position has been confirmed, the officer should first use the smallest motion possible to deflect the muzzle. In this case, turning the body through a simple pivot will be sufficient (Figure 7.4b). It is important to note that whether the officer turns in or out does not matter. Ideally, the officer wants to position himself between the suspect's two hands to prevent him from transitioning the firearm from one hand to the next, but if turning out, the officer should continue with no hesitation.

Next, the officer will step in as close to the assailant as possible to assure he can trap the suspect's weapon arm, in case the suspect retracts that arm. Contrary to many traditional law enforcement defensive tactics moves, this closure of the gap will render the handgun more difficult to use effectively.

The officer will then trap the arm and slide up the arm to make sure he controls the hand at the wrist (Figure 7.5).



**Figure 7.4b** The officer pivots to get out of the line of fire.



**Figure 7.5** The officer traps the suspect's arm and counterstrikes.

Next, the officer will rapidly counterstrike using brachial stuns, strikes, and knee strikes to subdue the opponent. Remember that eloquent technique is not as important as rapid, accurate strikes. Once the suspect is no longer resisting, the officer will reach with his free hand to grab the handgun with his pinky finger toward the muzzle ([Figure 7.6a](#)). Wrapping under the suspect's hand is not as strong as going over the suspect's hand, but will allow



**Figure 7.6a** The officer uses his shoulder to bring the suspect's gun forward and grabs it.



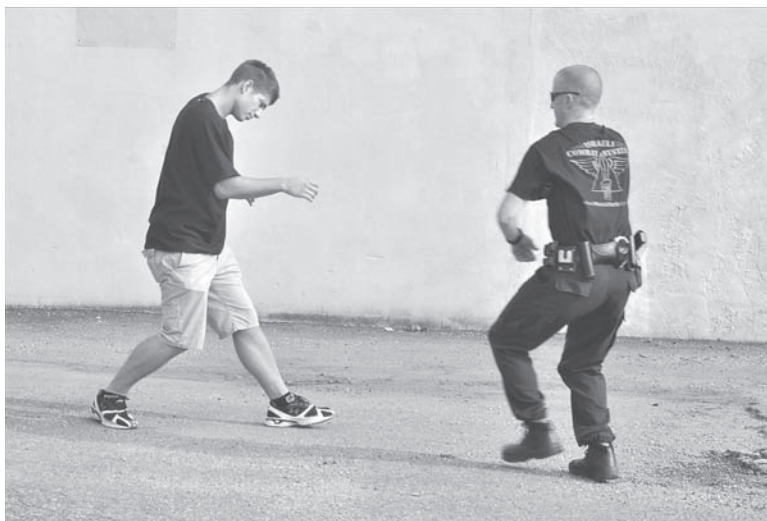
**Figure 7.6b** The officer pressed the beaver tail into the suspect's hand to dislodge it.

for an easier disarm. Wrapping over the suspect's hand will be stronger, but will not allow for an easy disarm.\*

Using a torque motion, the officer will drive the "beaver tail" of the handgun into the suspect's hand-webbing, and toward the ground (Figure 7.b).

\* Once again, either technique works. Whether the officer wraps over or under the suspect's hand, what is important is that the officer commits to a movement and does not stop fighting.





**Figure 7.6c** The officer should disengage.



**Figure 7.6d** The officer should transition to his own sidearm when possible.

As with the other techniques, the officer will then offset and draw his own firearm ([Figure 7.6c](#) and [Figure 7.6d](#)).

## Rear Handgun Defense (Head Target)

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In the case of a suspect who acts from the rear and places a handgun against an officer's head, the defense is different as the stakes are infinitely higher. There is no room for error when:



- You cannot see the suspect behind you.
- A gun is pointed at your head.

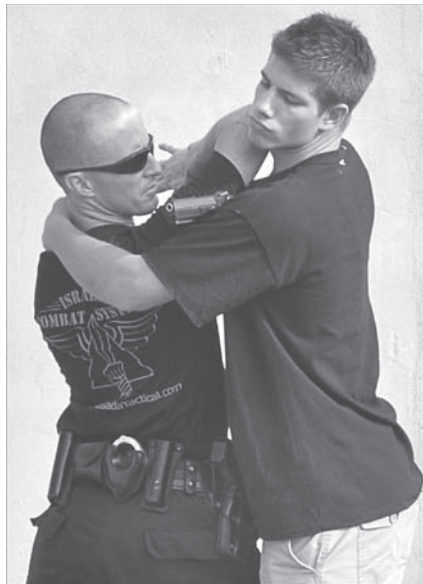
A threat to the back of the head is an extremely high-risk situation for the officer. The officer should react as explosively, rapidly, and violently as possible.

This is one situation where using a barely perceptible shift in position against the suspect might make a big difference. Whenever possible, for example, the officer should bring his hands toward his own chest to get them closer to the handgun.

First, using an elbow strike on the same side as the handgun, the officer should deliver a strike toward the suspect's head. The motion of the elbow will redirect the muzzle, and simultaneously deliver a strike. The elbow should be delivered in an angle upward to assure it redirects the handgun ([Figure 7.7](#)).

The officer will continue the rotational movement to turn and face his opponent. As he turns, the officer will use his hand to grab the suspect's arm and try to gain control of the handgun. The officer will then disarm the suspect using any technique he can execute. If needed, the officer should strike at the suspect first to "soften the target."

The officer should offset and draw his own sidearm.



**Figure 7.7** An explosive elbow will act to redirect and counterstrike.

## Handgun Retention Basics

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An assailant who has made the choice to go for the officer's gun has shown the intent and means to cause the officer severe bodily harm or death. These offenders, colloquially called "gun grabbers," are often hard-core repeat offenders, mentally ill or drug abusing suspects, or simply delusional suspects who have a death wish. Gun grabbers might want to die, and they might want to take an officer with them when they go.

The following sections address weapon retention in two overlapping areas: in and out of the holster.

### In the Holster

First, a word about retention holsters. It is absolutely imperative for the officer to be intimately familiar with his holster's weapon. If the officer unintentionally moves against the retention mechanism, for example, rocking the weapon backward to secure it, he may inadvertently make it easier for the suspect to extract the officer's firearm.

Assuming an officer is prepared to work *with* (rather than against) his retention holster, a natural defense can be mounted. First, the officer should place both of his hands on the handgun held by the suspect and press downward. The officer will then lower his center of gravity, dropping his full body weight lower to the ground, to increase the pressure on the suspect's hands. In these cases, a shorter officer actually has an advantage over a taller suspect, due to his proximity to the ground and the angle required for the suspect to maintain a firm grip ([Figure 7.8a](#)).

Next, if it can be done safely, the officer may let go with one hand and strike at the suspect.\* Depending on the location of the suspect, the officer can use punches, elbows, and head-butts. The officer will then turn his body to apply pressure on the suspect's wrist. It is important that the officer does not turn against his own retention mechanism. This turn should be executed violently and with a shouting command to "BACK OFF."

The officer may use his free hand to swat at the suspect's wrist in a side-ways-chopping motion to facilitate the release, then offset and draw his firearm ([Figure 7.8b](#) and [Figure 7.8c](#)).

If a suspect simply reaches toward the officer's holstered weapon, but has yet to grab the handgun, the officer has time to counter the move through repositioning. The officer should place one hand on his handgun to assure he maintains control of it, while simultaneously blading his body, keeping his

\* In cases where both of the officer's hands are needed to maintain control of the weapon in the holster, omit the strikes and move on to the next step.



**Figure 7.8a** The officer traps the suspect's hands and lowers his center of gravity.



**Figure 7.8b** The officer uses his hand to swat at the suspect's wrist.



**Figure 7.8c** The officer disengages and offsets.

weapon side away from the suspect. The officer will use his free hand to swat at the suspect's arm and move them away from his weapon.

The swat is made by thrusting the arm out straight to maximize surface area and margin of error. It is important to use the entire arm, not merely the palm, as the palm may miss the assailant's arm or lack sufficient strength to be effective. The officer will then offset and draw his firearm if it is tactically appropriate.

In reality, not all in-the-holster defenses are conducted before the suspect can actually touch the officer's weapon. Some gun grabbers may be able to actually get their hand on the officer's weapon before he can react. Once the suspect actually grabs onto the handgun, the officer must do whatever it takes to maintain control of the firearm. Losing this fight may cost the officer his life.

## Out of the Holster: Live Side

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Recall that the live side refers to a movement in front of the officer. In this case, if the officer is right handed, then the assailant will be in front or to the officer's left side. An out-of-holster, live-side defense scenario may be the result of a confrontation during a house clearing, arrest, or a struggle with firearm in hand. The biggest risk associated with this type of confrontation is having the handgun taken away from the officer and used against him.

Once the handgun has been grabbed, the officer will use a push-pull motion to retain it.

First, the officer should step forward, blading his body so his shoulder can be driven toward the suspect's wrist ([Figure 7.9](#)).

At the same time, the officer should pull the handgun across his chest, toward his strong side shoulder. Next, the officer will drive his shoulder through the suspect's wrist to force him to let go.\* Although the suspect's elbow might make an attractive primary target, the officer should avoid targeting any higher than the wrist, as that may result in an ineffective technique ([Figure 7.10a](#) to [Figure 7.10c](#)).



**Figure 7.9** The officer steps through, driving his shoulder towards the suspect's wrists.

\* When training in this technique, the "suspects" should have the thumb pointing toward the officer when grabbing the handgun to avoid potential elbow injury.



**Figure 7.10a** As the officer moves forward, he will pull the handgun across his chest.



**Figure 7.10b** The officer disengages.





**Figure 7.10c** The officer escalates to a higher force option.

The officer will then deliver an elbow toward the suspect's face and conduct a "tap-rack" function check of his weapon to clear any possible malfunction.

## Out of the Holster: Dead Side

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If the suspect grabs the handgun from the officer's strong side, he will be to the back of the officer, on his dead side (Figure 11a). Mechanically, it is almost impossible for the officer to drive his shoulder toward the suspect's wrist at



**Figure 7.11a** The officer uses a dead side grab.



**Figure 7.11b** A U-shaped turn will allow the officer to relocate the handgun using minimal strength.



**Figure 7.11c** This depicts what is happening midmovement to the other side.



**Figure 7.11d** The technique is now a live-side retention.

this angle. Thus, the officer's goal is to transition from the dead side retention into the live side retention.

First, the officer should use a U-shape motion to bring the handgun from one side to the other ([Figure 7.11b](#) to [Figure 7.11d](#)).

Next, the officer will step in a circular motion as his handgun is being repositioned. The officer can now execute the regular live side retention technique. Of course, if the gun-grabbing suspect is directly in front of the officer and grabs hold of his handgun, the officer should evaluate his options to fire on the suspect, depending on the circumstances.

## Handgun Defense While Mounted

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Executing a handgun defense while the suspect is sitting on the officer's hips is a high-risk situation. In this situation, an officer is on the ground, facing a handgun threat from a suspect who is in a position of dominance ([Figure 7.12a](#)). In order to create the best odds of survival, the officer must carefully prioritize and execute his defense strategy.

Obviously, the most significant and immediate concern is the handgun. The officer must address the primary threat, the handgun, and then the secondary threat, the suspect in the mount. First, redirect the handgun at the barrel. The officer's second hand will assist in controlling the handgun by placing it behind the handgun. Next, the officer should buck explosively, using his hips to drive the muzzle of the handgun into the ground over his shoulder ([Figure 7.12b](#)). Continue rolling to end in the suspect's guard. The officer must be aware of the muzzle direction at all times ([Figure 7.12c](#)).



**Figure 7.12a** Address the primary threat by redirecting the muzzle.



**Figure 7.12b** The officer bucks to address the secondary threat.





**Figure 7.12c** The officer ends in the suspect's guard and disarms him.

Strike at the suspect's chest using the handgun's barrel, making certain the muzzle is pointing at the suspect. Lastly, drag the handgun along the suspect's torso and toward your own hip. The pressure on the suspect's wrists will force him to let go of the weapon.

Recover to a standing position. Under these circumstances, it is highly probable a weapon malfunction has occurred, either due to the struggle or to the impact of the muzzle on the ground (mud, gravel, etc.). Barring other options, if the officer wishes to use the suspect's handgun, he must tap and rack to clear any possible malfunction.

## Handgun Defense from the Guard

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Again, when an officer finds himself in the less-than-advantageous position of the guard (the suspect is between the officer's legs), he must prioritize his risk strategy. Addressing the firearm by getting out of the line of fire must be the first priority, followed by the escape from the guard.

First, redirect the handgun by pushing at the barrel. The officer's second hand will assist by grabbing at the back of the handgun to increase control ([Figure 7.13a](#)). Next, turn onto the hip opposite from the redirected gun. This is done to minimize the chances of self-inflicted injuries by placing a knee in front of the muzzle.

The officer will then place his bottom foot on the suspect's hip, turn toward his other hip, and place the second foot on the suspect's hip. Next, the officer will explosively thrust his legs into the suspect, pushing him back. Simultaneously, drive the muzzle end of the handgun toward the suspect ([Figure 7.13b](#) to [Figure 7.13d](#)).



**Figure 7.13a** The officer redirects the muzzle.



**Figure 7.13b** The officer places his feet on the suspect's hip and begins to turn the muzzle towards the suspect.

If the officer fails to thrust and drive with extreme force against the suspect, the muzzle will be pointing back at him at the end of the struggle. Having shown himself capable of significant resistance, the officer will be in serious danger of being shot immediately. Use maximum effort to survive this encounter.

The officer will then recover to a standing position and transition to a higher level of force.



**Figure 7.13c** An explosive kick will force the suspect to let go.



**Figure 7.13d** Turning the muzzle toward the suspect will loosen his grip.

## Handgun Retention While Mounted

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In this situation, an officer has taken his handgun out of the holster and has been taken to the ground by a suspect. The suspect is attempting to actively disarm the officer from a position of dominance ([Figure 7.14a](#)). It is critical for an officer to retain his weapon when on the ground. If he loses his weapon, he has few options to defend himself from a deadly force threat. Retreating from the situation or compliance with the suspect are not options for police officers.

Certainly, the officer should maintain a firm grip on the handgun. If the suspect is attempting to press the handgun toward the officer's body, the officer should place his support hand on the back of the barrel to keep the muzzle away. As described with other moves, use an explosive buck movement with the hips, and simultaneously drive the handgun to the ground



**Figure 7.14a** The officer must assure the muzzle isn't pushed towards him.

([Figure 7.14b](#)). Continue the bucking movement to roll the suspect over ([Figure 7.14c](#)). Use the muzzle end of the handgun to strike at the suspect and force him to let go ([Figure 7.14d](#)).

As he disengages, the officer must tap and rack the firearm to clear any malfunction that may have occurred.



**Figure 7.14b** The officer bucks to get the suspect off balance.





**Figure 7.14c** The officer continues the roll to end in the suspect's guard.



**Figure 7.14d** The officer should disengage and manipulate any possible malfunction.

## Handgun Retention on the Ground in the Holster

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In this situation, an officer has been taken to the ground by a suspect and the suspect is attempting to remove the officer's handgun from the holster. This technique will work from either the mount or guard position. If done from the guard, the bucking motion must be more explosive to accommodate the suspect's legs between the officer's legs.

Once the suspect grabs the officer's handgun with a cross draw, the officer will use his same side arm to press the suspect's hand down, making

drawing more difficult.\* Next, the officer will then drive his other arm *under* the suspect's elbow and *over* the suspect's upper arm. If possible, the officer will then grab hold of his own head for more control; however, depending on the suspect and officer's size differential, this may not always be possible.

Using an explosive motion, buck the suspect off in the direction of the trapped arm. As he is rolling over, transition to the side of the suspect to prevent countermeasures, such as entrapment between the suspect's legs. Adjust to a perpendicular position to the suspect while still maintaining control of the hand on the handgun. The movement will increase the pressure on the suspect's arm and force him to release his grip. The officer can use his strong hand to peel off the suspect's fingers from the gun, if needed. Use the support hand to strike at the suspect. The officer will disengage and transition to a higher force option as needed.

A training note: This technique is very effective, but also very violent. Use a great degree of caution when practicing this move to prevent training injuries.

## Final Commentary on Handgun Defenses

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The police firearm is a constant companion for uniformed officers. It is easy to become complacent in the carrying of the firearm, especially in a retention holster, when an officer has never been faced with a disarm attempt. However, some offenders will look for the opportunity to take away a weapon from an officer and use it. Suspects who disarm officers have one thing in mind: killing the police officer.

It is rational to want to fight for a firearm, when one comes into play against you. Techniques that keep officers as safe as possible, while offering the greatest opportunity for regaining control of the offender, are the best approaches. This strategy means staying out of the line of fire, continuing to fight, and targeting the suspect and not the handgun.

Handgun defenses from the ground add another layer of difficulty for officer survival. Whether facing a suspect's handgun or fighting for your own weapon, a struggle over a handgun is a deadly force situation unlike any other. Utilize all of your personal resources and maximum effort during practice for the fight of your life. Use an aggressive, explosive defense with no warning. Target the vulnerable areas of the suspect and disengage to a safe position.

Officers must be well-acquainted with whatever retention holsters they choose to use on the street. A worn or complicated holster will not help

\* For safety purposes when training, the suspect **must** grab the handgun in a cross draw. Failure to do so may result in a dislocated elbow or other serious injury.

matters. Choose your equipment carefully and practice with it until you master it. Work regularly with a partner who can safely provide the mock “gun grabs” that will enable you to execute a smooth defense across a range of situations.

## Introduction

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As mentioned in Chapter 1, the phenomenon of mixed martial arts (MMA) has grown in popularity over the past decade. It is now the second largest revenue-generating sport in the United States. With the popularity of the sport, the number of people training in arts such as Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Sambo, and submission-style wrestling, has grown exponentially. Whether in legitimate dojos or back-alley fight clubs, studying the techniques of engaging in physical confrontation is trendier than ever.

However, the so-called “grappling” arts are not new. The ancient Greeks and Romans practiced wrestling during one-on-one combat more than 2,000 years ago. Japanese martial arts have long included a study of ground techniques in disciplines such as Jiu-Jitsu and Judo. Today, the number of practitioners has never numbered so many, and it is continuing to grow each year.

As with most trends, the popularity of MMA has not escaped the attention of the criminal element. Today, people from all walks of life train in combat performance. Groups, including gang members and other criminals with fighting discipline and experience, will come in contact with police officers. It is the job of the officer to have superior training and preparation for those inevitable encounters.

When the worst case scenario happens in police work, the fight invariably ends up on the ground with one or more suspects fighting the officer for a position of dominance. Trained opponents, even those who are not highly skilled, add a degree of difficulty to the ground encounter. When an officer’s life is at risk during a ground-fighting encounter, a range of techniques gleaned from martial arts disciplines can be effective for survival. This chapter examines the options for defeating skilled and unskilled opponents in a ground-fighting situation.

## What Are the Chances?

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The orchestrated action of a suspect attempting to tackle an officer and take the fight to the ground is significantly higher today than it was a decade ago. The mere fact that so many more suspects are interested in or actively learning MMA is one reason. Increased violence is a reality of the world we live in; from an officer’s perspective, this reality represents a new set of threats.



Most officers realize the dangers inherent in our work. However, a ground fight represents a uniquely difficult circumstance for the uniformed officer without ground-fighting experience. He may have to contend with multiple attackers, one of whom takes him to the ground while the others use blunt weapons. Attackers armed with edged weapons complicate traditional defenses when an officer is unexpectedly confined to the ground. Weapon retention becomes more difficult to execute successfully due to space and angle limitations. And, finally, the ground itself—whether it is asphalt, grass, or cement—is not a very pleasant surface to fight on, increasing chances of officer injuries.

## **Clever Marketing Doesn't Make It Effective**

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As a response to the growing need of officers facing trained opponents, MMA began marketing their fighting systems directly to law enforcement agencies, advocating the need to learn these skills to better defend against a ground fight. However, this clever money-making strategy did not solve the training problem for police officers. In some cases, the marginal training provided to officers in a few hasty sessions made the situation even worse. As ill-trained officers began to believe that taking the fight to the ground was a good solution to aggressive resistance, they chose to take more opponents to the ground. The results: ugly.

These officers quickly realized that the “ground” on the streets is not nearly as forgiving a surface to fight on as the gym floor training mats. They discovered that sports techniques do not work well when wearing duty belts or fighting for one’s life. They also learned that “tapping out” in response to pain or injury is not a valid option. Opponents who are truly skilled in ground fighting have trained for years, or even decades, not *weeks*. We cannot aim to become masters of this art in 40 hours or less.

Ground survival training for police officers should be easy-to-learn, survival-oriented tactics. MMA instructors teach officers to gain a position of dominance and seek opponent’s submission. In contrast, the Israeli Combat System (ICS) instructors provide officers with the skills that will allow them to defend themselves on the ground with one indisputable, short-term goal: *Get back up to a standing position*. After all, most officers do not train in the use of their tools while lying on their backs. We will fight like we train. Thus, the mindset for ICS ground survival training is to get back up and access higher force option tools as needed to survive the event.

In the coming sections, we will discuss the various fall breaks to minimize impact injuries with the ground. We also will discuss strategies for limiting time on the ground and how to return to a solid and upright fighting position as soon as possible after being taken to the ground.

## Basic Fall Breaks

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### Front Fall Break

In the real world, when a fight goes to the ground, it is usually because the officer was taken there by an opponent's attack. Whether the opponent is trained or untrained, the officer taken to the ground in any situation must learn to minimize the chances of injury, protect his vital organs, and disperse the impact as he goes down.

In the forward fall break, the suspect has executed a move from behind the officer, causing the officer to fall forward ([Figure 8.1a](#)). As soon as the officer realizes he is going down, his objective must be to protect his face, groin, and knee joints. Recall that a face or knee injury may be life-threatening for police officers. If you cannot stand or see or breathe, you cannot win the fight. Force motion acceleration will make it unlikely that an officer can be disarmed or otherwise compromised by capitalizing on a “flinch” response to protect these vital areas.

Initially then, the officer should kick his feet backwards to assure his knees are off the ground upon impact. This also will allow him to spread his feet, allowing for a larger, more stable base. Next, the officer should “slap” at the ground, making contact with his forearms, and avoiding impact with the wrist or tip of the elbow joint ([Figure 8.1b](#)).

The officer should turn his head to the side to further protect his face, in case his fall break is not completely successful. The officer will then immediately rotate his body to a defensive position on the ground, facing his opponent.



**Figure 8.1a** The officer is swept from behind.



**Figure 8.1b** The officer uses the proper fall break technique to stay safe.

### Rear Fall Break

When falling backward, the officer must protect the vital areas of his spine, head, and tail bone. As the officer is falling, he should tuck his chin in to assure his head does not strike the ground on impact. The officer should cross his hands to allow for a maximum “slap” movement and impact redirection ([Figure 8.2a](#) to [Figure 8.2c](#)).

Next, the officer should roll onto his back, keeping his hips elevated off the ground. This position disperses the majority of the impact along his spine and back. From this position, the officer should make contact with his arms on the ground, but avoid impact with his vulnerable elbows or wrists. As soon as he is safely on the ground, the officer will assume a defensive position facing his opponent.



**Figure 8.2a** The officer is swept backwards.



**Figure 8.2b** The officer disperses the impact and protects his head.



**Figure 8.2c** The officer should assume a defensive position as soon as possible.

## Basic Ground Fighting/Defensive Positions

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The officer's goal should always be to get back up as soon as he can. However, it will not always be possible. The officer may have to assume a defensive posture that will allow him to protect himself, deliver strikes, move, and eventually recover to a standing position.\*

For example, imagine you have been attacked from the front and taken to the ground. You have found yourself on your back or buttocks, facing the threat. To assume a good defensive position, your head should be raised off the ground. Both of your hands should come up to protect the midsection and face. Your lower back is elevated off the ground to protect the tail bone and minimize friction when moving. One leg is coiled back and ready to kick. Other foot is on the ground to move and turn the body ([Figure 8.3](#)).

When an officer finds himself on his side, he must also maximize his position to remain protected. First, the officer should position himself as propped up on one elbow/forearm to minimize friction when moving. Next, one hand comes up to protect the midsection and face. The bottom leg is pulled in, so it is not vulnerable to being trapped. The other leg is coiled and ready to kick aggressively ([Figure 8.4](#)).



**Figure 8.3** Defensive back position.



**Figure 8.4** Defensive side position.

\* Which way should the officer roll? One strategy might favor rolling atop the officer's firearm to protect it; however, this also may completely limit access to the weapon, if it is needed in close quarters. Practice both and cope with whatever happens.

## Effective Ground Kicks

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Once on the ground, the officer may have to deliver kicks in order to create space so he can recover. ICS teaches two kicks: the front kick and side kick. The guiding principles are the same for each kick.

Power comes directly from the hips. Therefore, the hip must be fully committed and engaged in both types of kicks. Aim is very important. Randomly executed kicks will not only miss the target, they may hyperextend the officer's knee. Do not aim too high, as range can be an issue. Taller officers have a significant advantage in this situation. Do not aim too low, however, as there is a risk you will trip the suspect, dropping him right on top of you.

What is the ideal target for ground kicks? The opponent's joints and vital areas below the waist are best. Front kicks should be delivered toward the opponent's groin or hip to create distance ([Figure 8.5a](#)). Side kicks should be delivered with the foot parallel to the ground, targeting the opponent's knees ([Figure 8.5b](#)).

As with all defensive moves, recognize that the best follow-up to your defense is a good offense. Always recoil your kicks, in case you need to kick again and move quickly to get back up.



**Figure 8.5a** A front kick from the ground.



**Figure 8.5b** A side kick from the ground.



## Recovery from the Ground

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Once the officer recognizes the opportunity to do so, his inclination should be to recover to a standing position as soon as possible. However, it is not as simple as just standing up when a lull in the fight happens. The officer must make sure he maintains balance and is ready to engage throughout the recovery process, as the fight is not going to simply stop. The skilled ground fighter must be able to continue to fight while he regains his footing.

To practice this movement, the officer on the ground will take up a starting position on his weapon side. The officer will then take his top foot and plant it behind the base leg ([Figure 8.6a](#)).

Next, the officer will prop his body up on his base hand and the rear foot. The officer should be able to kick, continue his ascent, or descend back down to the ground from this position, as is tactically applicable ([Figure 8.6b](#)). Next, the officer will take his lower leg and swing it under his hip, until his foot is posted solidly behind him (lunge position). The officer will then rise up quickly to a defensive stance ([Figure 8.6c](#) and [Figure 8.6d](#)).



**Figure 8.6a** The officer places his top foot behind his base leg.



**Figure 8.6b** The officer props up his body.



**Figure 8.6c** The officer lunges up.



**Figure 8.6d** The officer reengages in the fight.

Although this method of recovery is not the most intuitive, it allows the officer maximum protection throughout the process and finishes in a combat/defensive stance. He is ready to fight, if it is still necessary.

## Striking on the Ground

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Prior to teaching any escapes from the ground, the officers must realize that criminals on the street are likely to engage them in the most violent way possible. Suspects are not going to throw down a white glove or issue some



other gentlemanly challenge. They are planning to strike first, strike hard, and keep striking until they win. Therefore, it is imperative that the officers learn to strike *from* the ground and to take strikes while *on* the ground.

The ability to master the fear of pain and injury is an invaluable experience that should not be omitted from traditional defensive tactics programs. Less physical programs that limit force-on-force contact due to concern about the potential for minor injury cheat police officers who will face brutal confrontations on the streets. However, practicing striking while on the ground is a risky endeavor, likely to cause minor injuries, such as abrasions, bruises, and contusions.

It is important to note that pain does not always equal debilitating injury. A little pain can serve as a motivator for some students to tap into their full fighting potential. Certainly, safety precautions must be taken to minimize the chance of significant or permanent injury during practice. All participants must wear gloves, mouth pieces, and groin protection to ensure safety for all.

## The Mounted Escape

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When an assailant is in the mount position, straddling the officer's hips, it represents a risky situation for the officer. Mounts can be sought by both trained and untrained opponents. Although an officer may have extensive training in ground fighting, his primary goal is the same as with other ground defenses and that is to get back up as soon as possible.

The first movement the officer uses to escape from the mount is an explosive bucking motion with his hips to force the suspect to fall forward. The officer must use all of his large quadrant leg muscles to thrust violently upward. If the bucking motion on its own is insufficient, the officer may pull on the suspect's shirt, or even strike to force the attacker off balance.

Once the suspect has posted his hands on the ground, the officer will trap one arm and bring it toward his own chest so it no longer supports the suspect. The officer will then trap the suspect's leg on the same side, using his own leg (Figure 8.7).

The officer will then use his free arm to push on the suspect's hip as he performs a second buck and rolls the suspect over. Finally, the officer will "posture up" immediately to prevent the suspect from locking his legs around the officer and holding him down.

Posturing up, as shown in Figure 8.8, is an upright body position (assumed from a kneeling pose on both knees) that prevents the assailant from pulling the officer back down into a submission hold. Once an officer postures up, he can get back to a standing position and transition to higher force options as needed.



**Figure 8.7** By bucking and trapping the suspect's hand, the officer stops him from striking and resisting the roll.



**Figure 8.8** After rolling the suspect, the officer must posture up and control the suspect's hips.

## Defeating the Ground Strike

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The ground strike means the suspect is atop the officer, and striking the upper body of the officer. From this position, the suspect can strike the officer's face and body with both hands, often with complete impunity (Figure 8.9). Using force to shift the suspect's body off balance is the primary method for defeating this position.

There are four levels of response for the officer in this position: cover, defend, trap, and counterstrike. Level one is cover and move. Untrained



**Figure 8.9** With the suspect striking from atop, the officer must protect his vital areas (Level One).



**Figure 8.10** The officer blocks and deflects the suspect's strikes (Level Two).

students will attempt to protect the vital areas of the face with their arms and elbows while trying to squirm away from the suspect. In truth, level one offers little resistance to a brutalizing suspect intent on committing injury to the officer.

Level two is the use of inside and outside defenses. In this technique, students use blocks and parries to manage the threat ([Figure 8.10](#)).

Level three allows students to both defend and trap. In this technique, students continue to use blocks and parries to maneuver into a control hold on the assailant's arm. Once the arm is trapped, the officer may be



**Figure 8.11** The officer traps the suspect (Level Three).



**Figure 8.12** The officer counterstrikes (Level Four).

able to regain complete control of the suspect without further escalation ([Figure 8.11](#)).

Level four involves the full range of defend, trap, and counterstrike. In this technique, students continue beyond the trap of the suspect's arm and into multiple, rapid strikes of the suspect's vulnerable areas until the threat is ended ([Figure 8.12](#)).

## Guard Escape

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### Top Position

Experienced ground fighters may learn to use the “guard” to trap an officer. The guard position places the officer between the suspect's legs, which may be locked around his lower torso. This position allows ground fighters to exploit the trapped opponent via upper and lower body strikes to vital areas like the face, kidneys, throat, and ribs ([Figure 8.13](#)).





**Figure 8.13** The officer is trapped in the suspect's guard.

If the officer finds himself in the suspect's guard, he should still try to get up. Some officers will be strong enough to defeat the guard through sheer force, standing up with the suspect's legs still wrapped around them. However, if engaged with a proficient ground fighter, an officer may find himself trapped in a succession of locks and choke attempts by the suspect.

There are many different ways of "breaking the guard." Each particular method may have merit and applicability under various circumstances. For the purposes of this book, one method will be given. First, the officer should posture up as soon as possible, placing his hands on the suspect's hips to prevent the suspect's hips from moving and controlling the fight. The officer will then drive his elbows into the inner thigh area, applying pressure on the suspect's femoral nerves. This pressure often generates compliance by causing significant pain to an unprotected area of the suspect ([Figure 8.14](#)).

If the suspect is still resisting, a series of alternate strikes to vulnerable areas is recommended. Primary targets might include the groin, solar plexus, and throat. Once the suspect opens his legs and releases the guard, the officer should stand up and move out of kicking range.



**Figure 8.14** The officer applies pressure to the suspect's femoral nerves.

### Bottom Position

Although not as bad as some positions, the bottom position in the guard represents many risks, including strikes, ankle locks, and weapon retention risks. As a high priority, the officer must protect his face with his hands to ensure he will be able to continue fighting and deploy other weapons later in the encounter.

First, the officer will shift his weight onto one hip (side), and create space that allows the same side foot to be placed on the suspect's hip ([Figure 8.15a](#)).

Next, the officer will use leverage to shift his weight to a higher position on his back, raising his other foot to kick at the suspect. If the suspect is large, or the officer is unable to get his feet in position, he can keep transitioning from side to side until his feet are in position. The officer should administer a



**Figure 8.15a** The officer places one foot on the suspect's hip.



**Figure 8.15b** The officer kicks the suspect back.

series of kicks to the vulnerable areas of the suspect until he creates enough space to disengage and assume an upright position. The officer should recover to a standing position as soon as possible ([Figure 8.15b](#)).

## Figure Four Lock

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Submission holds are used to defeat an opponent through control or domination of key areas of an opponent's bodily systems, like the airway or blood supply, or through pain compliance. Although great techniques to know, the use of submission holds are tricky at best for police officers to actually execute in the field. The reason for this is the large majority of submission holds require too much risk, in terms of position and ability to transition to higher use of force options, such as impact weapons and firearms. So much of a ground fight requires exposing the officer's weapon side to the suspect during intimate and prolonged grappling, and the potential loss of equipment like batons, radios, and firearms. In essence, this makes most submission techniques simply too exotic for police use in the real world.

In contrast, the figure four lock is the exception. This lock allows for execution of a control hold with minimal risk to the officer. It can be executed by officers in full duty gear—a difficult feat for most, if not all, other submission techniques. The officer can end the technique in the handcuffing position, and it serves for weapon retention purposes as well. Thus, the figure four lock is the only submission technique used in ICS training for police officers.



**Figure 8.16** The officer traps the suspect's wrist.

To execute the figure four lock from any ground position, the suspect must first place his hands on the ground. Whether the suspect has been thrown off balance or is preparing to get back to a standing position, the hands must be grounded.\* As a natural follow up to a mounted strike defense, once an officer has thrown the suspect's balance off, the figure four lock is difficult to escape. First, the officer will grab one of the suspect's wrists, with his thumb up (Figure 8.16).

The officer will open his legs and use an explosive "sit up" motion to bring his body up close to the suspect. The officer will then send his free arm over the suspect's shoulder on the same side as the trapped hand (Figure 8.17a).

The officer will then drive his free arm under the suspect's elbow and grab hold of his own wrist. By doing so, the officer completes the figure four lock (Figure 8.17b).

The officer will then lie down, pulling the suspect's arm downward and behind the suspect's back, bringing him down across his own body (Figure 8.17c). The officer will continue to press the suspect down toward the ground as he slides his own body out from underneath the suspect.

It is important that the officer does not roll the suspect too far; this will allow the suspect to escape the control hold. Once the officer escapes, he can handcuff or disengage from the suspect.

\* A suspect who does not have his hands on the ground will escape from this technique. However, a suspect can be thrown off balance by a forward shove or other move to encourage him to assume this position. Likewise, a distraction technique, such as a strike, may be used, if needed.





**Figure 8.17a** Officer moves to control the suspect's arm and wrist.



**Figure 8.17b** Officer secures the figure four lock.



**Figure 8.17c** Officer manipulates the figure four lock to control the suspect.

## Final Commentary on Ground Fighting

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The ability to survive a ground fighting situation is becoming a realistic training need for police officers. Given the sheer number of skilled and unskilled suspects with an interest in mixed martial arts (MMA) training, the odds of facing a potential ground fight has increased over the past 10 years. Police officers need to develop a mindset that matches their particular circumstances: Fighting from a standing position is the preferred position.

As we complete a brief introduction to surviving a ground assault, police officers should recognize that they must only acquire the skills that are absolutely necessary: basic fall breaks, defenses, and one submission hold that will not fail them. Practicing the few crucial techniques until they are instinctive is the key.

The more glamorous fighting methods are not useful for street survival, in any case. Leave the showboating to the professional MMA fighters. In law enforcement, we need to end the fight, not score points; we must be effective, not exotic.



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# The Silent Backup Weapon

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# 9

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## Introduction

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It is a dark summer evening in the city. Heat radiates from the sidewalks as you escort your significant other out for dinner at Luigi's, an out-of-the-way restaurant downtown. After a nice meal, you leave Luigi's and find yourself in a secluded alleyway on the way to the parking lot. As you approach the car with your date on your arm, a suspicious character emerges from the shadows. Armed with a knife, he demands your wallet. He leers at your date lasciviously and prepares to move one or both of you to another location, where another crime can be perpetrated. Unfortunately, you left your handgun in the glove box of the car and your date is defenseless. What are your options?

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## The “Unofficial” Backup Weapon

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Many police officers carry a backup weapon while on duty, usually in the form of a second firearm beneath the uniform shirt, attached to the vest or on the ankle or duty boot. While secondary firearms have certainly saved lives, most (if not all) police officers carry yet another silent backup weapon that they may never even consider deploying because they are not conditioned to its use as an offensive (rather than defensive) partner. Special operators feel very differently about this device, but the difference is merely the training they have received in its use. We are referring to the veritable companion of law enforcement officers everywhere: the folding knife.

Whether it is called a tactical knife, folder, or rescue tool, the duty knife is a great tool. Almost everywhere a police officer travels, whether on or off duty, he takes a knife with him. Whether he carries it to remove flexi-cuffs of suspects, free the seatbelts of crash victims, or just to cut fishing line, *he does carry it*. Thus, it is a resource that can and should be used to help you survive a critical incident.

There are at least two distinct advantages of the folding knife over the firearm. One advantage is the ability to inflict both lethal and nonlethal wounds with the same tool.\* This inherent flexibility also can create a liabil-

\* Although theoretically, the firearm can be used to inflict less lethal wounds by targeting the suspect's extremities, police officers are not trained to do so. As a result, firearms use is always considered deadly force.

ity concern, as the argument could be made that an officer who used deadly force *should* have chosen to use lesser force to stop a threat. This kind of sentiment is often expressed loudly to the media by the public in the wake of shootings involving so-called “impaired” suspects, such as suicidal teens armed with edged weapons, or elderly aggressors who refuse to drop a loaded firearm. It is an unfounded argument, as deadly force in circumstances like these is legitimately justified.

However, it is beneficial that the trained knife fighter does not have to commit to the use of deadly force when deploying the weapon. He can slash tendons to merely disable or stab critical areas to kill. Thus, it allows for more discretion in the use of force than the firearm. And, unlike the firearm, which may be overtly prohibited or simply forbidden in some venues, the knife is discreetly permitted in almost every public place.

Because you will be carrying a folding knife, the Israeli Combat System (ICS) teaches that you should be prepared to deploy it offensively in the worst case scenario. Assuming you are facing a suspect prepared to use deadly force, you should be ready to use *any weapon* to save your life or the life of another human being. This chapter will examine the use of the “rescue tool” as an offensive weapon of choice when a firearm is not functional or unavailable.

## A Private or Official Action?

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In the scenario described in the beginning of this chapter, it might seem harsh (even brutal, perhaps) to consider using a knife to defend yourself (or your date) from the suspect. Does it seem harsh when you consider the various outcomes associated with this scenario? A potentially lethal stabbing, fatal sexual assault, and/or kidnapping for ransom are a few of the definite possibilities.

Whatever the suspect’s intentions, he has expressed his willingness to use a weapon of deadly force against you to commit a felony—street robbery. As a police officer, you would not hesitate to bring a gun into a knife fight. However, in this scenario, you are not acting as a police officer, you are a private citizen, accosted by the criminal element in a public place. As such, you should begin to see the tactical knife as a potential weapon to be deployed offensively against the enemy, in emergency situations only.

The knife, when used effectively, can quickly end a potentially dangerous encounter. It might be messy and you probably will get cut, but it is better to survive to fight another day.

## The Force Continuum

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As a matter of habit, most special operators and military units work in the field with a fixed blade on their person. Unfortunately for us, most officers cannot carry a large, fixed blade on their duty belt. Decried as too intimidating and definitely not socially approved, a sheathed blade is ominous to the public and incompatible with the view of law enforcement officers as approachable and friendly civil servants. Thus, we are left with the option of the discreetly carried folding knife.

Generally speaking, if *using* a tactical knife is officially sanctioned as a use of force option by your department, you are probably not employed as a police officer within the United States. Few domestic jurisdictions even comprehend the possibility that a knife might be used as a weapon by a police officer while on duty. The expectation is that if deadly force is used, it will be administered via the firearm. This makes the knife an ideal silent partner.

The cruel truth is that deadly force comes in many forms. The use of certain punches (for example, targeting the suspect's throat), intermediate weapons (baton strikes to the back of the head), or moving vehicles can all constitute deadly force assaults. Without a doubt, an officer who uses his knife against a suspect should expect to be examined under the microscope after the fact. However, research shows that courts usually favor the officer when evaluating deadly force encounters. As long as the force was justified, given the facts known to the officer at the time, he will be exonerated by the legal process.

The offensive knife is even more defensible when used by a private citizen during a criminal encounter. After all, people have a right to self-defense. The knife is but another tool, albeit, an emergency tool, to accomplish the same mission, which is surviving a deadly force encounter.

## Up Close and Personal

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Researchers of violent crime have noted that it often takes a high level of intimacy to use a knife to assault or kill another human being.\* Knife attacks require very close proximity and a high level of commitment to cause serious,

\* In cases where a victim's body shows "overkill"—tens (or even hundreds) of stab wounds and/or postmortem penetrating trauma injuries—it is often apparent that the killing was the result of intense rage. Intense rage is frequently associated with crimes of passion (e.g., unrequited love, love triangles, etc.), leading to the description of edged weapon attacks as "crimes of intimacy."



bloody injury to an opponent. You will feel, smell, and even potentially taste your opponent when you use a knife on him.

As a result, most people are squeamish about using a knife to commit an assault against a stranger. However, a true warrior does not flinch from such a confrontation to preserve life. In fact, a trained student of ICS is ready to act under these circumstances to defend himself or others without hesitation. Let's now examine the strategies and targets for offensive knife deployment.

## Edged Weapon Carry

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Wherever you choose to carry your folding knife, when it is carried for self-defense, it should be in a concealed but accessible location. In fact, trained knife aficionados may choose to carry more than one knife. The primary carry location may be relatively common, for example, the front or rear pants pocket is a typical choice for many police officers. Other locations are inside the waistband, belt, or body armor. Yet another option is inside the shirt on a chain around the officer's neck.

When a secondary knife is carried, it may be placed in a more obscure location. Some tactical areas for a secondary knife carry include the small of the back, the boot, or near the shirt collar. The secondary knife is meant to be used in an emergency and is placed accordingly.

The important consideration when planning where to carry either a primary or secondary knife is that the location is accessible to the officer and difficult for the opponent to strip. Once an officer indexes his knife, by touching it with his hand, he must be ready to deploy it quickly. In the next section, we will examine the two kinds of deployment.

## Deploying to the Target

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For the purposes of our discussion, there are two kinds of knife deployment, the static and the dynamic. A static deployment refers to the stealthy opening or drawing of a knife without the opponent's awareness. The static draw is usually accompanied by a distraction (via verbal or body gestures) to prevent the opponent from observing the movement. Once accessed, the knife is held behind the officer's thigh until needed.

In contrast, the dynamic deployment refers to the sudden drawing of the knife with no attempt to disguise the weapon draw. The dynamic draw is used when an officer is ready to use the weapon against the attacker without hesitation. He may use a forward ([Figure 9.1a](#)) or reverse grip ([Figure 9.1b](#)) to





**Figure 9.1a** Forward grip.



**Figure 9.1b** Reverse grip.

deploy the knife in combat. Both grips require a degree of practice to achieve smooth operation of a folding knife mechanism.

The forward grip can be transitioned to the reverse grip (or vice versa) with relative ease using a gravity drop roll. The roll is performed by releasing the grip, leaving only the thumb and middle fingers on the knife. From this position, a brisk, circular motion will move the knife into the other grip where you can regrasp the weapon with the cutting edge away. With a little practice, this three-step movement becomes instinctual ([Figure 9.2a](#) to [Figure 9.2c](#)).



**Figure 9.2a** Forward grip.



**Figure 9.2b** The knife is allowed to “drop.”



**Figure 9.2c** The knife is rolled into a reverse grip.

## Training Considerations

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Training police officers in the use of the knife can be controversial at best. Most, if not all, police academies will not permit trainees to be introduced to the concept of using a knife in self-defense during a lethal assault. However, the ICS philosophy is to prepare police officers to survive—under all possible circumstances. Without the perception of the knife as a potential tool of survival, police officers will not use it to save their own lives. Indeed, many police officers have been found dead with their knives still on them, neatly folded and impotent in their pockets.

Although it may not be possible to allow police officers to actually train in force-on-force confrontations with red (training) knives in a police academy setting, the strategy of using a knife to survive a worst case encounter can be explored as a tactical mindset concept. Talk to officers about what they might do if disarmed, kidnapped, or nearing death during combat. Would they be willing to be inordinately brutal if it meant they would survive? The answer should be *yes*. With an absence of other options, could they use a knife to defend themselves? Again, the answer should be *yes*. A discussion about the targets available for knife deployment—both lethal and nonlethal—can complete this tactical mindset training without exposing an academy trainer to liability garnered through actual practice of knife-fighting techniques.

However, mere discussion of knife-fighting targets is not the same as practicing the execution of lethal tactics. Discussion of techniques is a cerebral classroom activity that can become part of an officer survival program, safely vetted by administrators. In contrast, practice of the techniques is the way of the warrior. Until police training can become more warrior-oriented (and less socially correct) by design, trainers must work to give the maximum level of survivability to students in training while minimizing personal and agency risk. When your hands are tied by bureaucratic requirements such as these, seek to merely convey this:

The knife is available to you as an offensive weapon when all else fails. Be prepared to use it.

If you plant this seed in the mind of your students and allow it to grow, it may save their lives.

## Targets

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### From the Neck Up

Most targets that are located from the neck up are fatal, simply due to the proximity to the vital organs essential for survival. However, certain confrontations require lethal counterattacks to preserve life. Officers forced to use the knife to protect themselves are the best judges of what targets are acceptable under the circumstances.

Lethal targets in this section include the mandibular angle, medulla oblongata, hypoglossal, trachea, eye gate, forehead, and carotid artery. Nonlethal targets include the forehead and cheek.

### From the Neck to Waist

When striking from the neck to the waist, it is important to note two factors that may prevent a successful attack: the suspect's clothing and weight. In much the same way that the bullet-resistant vest protects the officer from incidental stabs or slashes, clothing, such as down-filled jackets, leather or metal-adorned overcoats, provides some protection from knife attacks. Striking an opponent with this manner of dress may be more difficult; the overall level of damage will be reduced.

In considering the second factor of the suspect's weight, obviously combat is not a beauty pageant. We know that obesity among all populations (suspects and officers) is increasing exponentially. In terms of combat, it is important to know that obesity protects suspects from edged weapons in two ways: (1) it increases the distance from the skin to the vital organs and (2) it provides extra "padding" of fat beneath the surface of the skin to protect the muscles and tendons. Thus, depending on the size of your knife, you may not be able to inflict the damage you expect with an obese opponent.

Lethal targets in this section include the subclavian artery, wrist, heart, armpit, diaphragm, spleen, liver, bladder, and kidneys. Nonlethal targets include the opponent's arm tendons, shoulders, and hands.

### From the Waist Down

Striking an opponent from the waist down is not an ideal attack. However, there are circumstances when this area is the only target available. If you find yourself with a critical injury, unable to get back to a standing position, and disarmed of your firearm at the feet of an opponent with no other options, use the targets available to win the fight.

The one lethal target in this section is the femoral artery. Nonlethal targets include the groin, hamstrings, and Achilles tendon.

## Final Commentary

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In general, when police officers consider use of deadly force, they automatically focus on the firearm. However, deadly force can come in many disguises. When the use of deadly force is justified, but the firearm is not available or nonfunctional, know the other options available to inflict maximum damage and preserve life. Using the knife is brutal, but combat is a brutal business and self-defense is an adequate reason for many lethal attacks.

Beyond the Hollywood versions of knife fighting, with ambidextrous bad guys wielding dual butterfly knives in a fury, there are real situations where the only thing that may stand between police officers and death is the silent back-up weapon that they carry: the folding knife. In the event that you find yourself in a situation where the knife is the only option you have, you should not hesitate to use it. Know those hidden targets that inflict lethal and nonlethal damage to your opponent and use them accordingly.

Legal prosecution is possible for officers who deploy a knife against a suspect in an aggressive confrontation. Obviously, it is not something that is usually taught in the academy. Always ensure that you follow the force continuum of your departmental policy.

ICS teaches police officers to have a contingency plan for situations that cannot be anticipated. In the worst case scenario, the need for officer survival trumps potential litigation. As police officers say, “It is better to be judged by twelve than carried by six.”



## Introduction

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Designing challenging practice drills is the best way in which trainers can simulate a stressful environment to reinforce skills and increase students' confidence in the tools and techniques of combat survival. Static drills, in which students practice under relaxed conditions, are not the choice of the Israeli Combat System (ICS) trainers. They are simply too unrealistic to accomplish much in the way of actual combat readiness. Short of placing the students in actual fights, drills are the best way to get students to feel some of the psychological and physiological responses to stress.\*

There are many approaches to quality drill design. The goal of a well-designed drill is to challenge students to develop more endurance and commitment to survival in spite of the level of difficulty presented. ICS drills are designed to cause students to lose fine motor skills, through strenuous activity, and to elicit the experience of some of the effects of stress, such as an increased heart rate, tunnel vision, auditory exclusion, and the “shakes” brought on by fatigue.

This chapter is designed to provide guidance on developing your own drills for training. For the purposes of this book, we will discuss three kinds of drills: fatigue, aggression, and sensory deprivation/overload. Following an overview of each kind of drill, a few examples of well-designed drills are included for reference.

## Types of Drills

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### Fatigue Drills

Fatigue drills are designed specifically to cause a student to get tired prior to performing a skill, or to induce fatigue by performing a new skill with many repetitions. In this way, the instructor can extend the endurance of students who are new to physical exertion and assess effort over the duration of a drill. Students gain experience with the limits of their own abilities—an important threshold for all police officers to know.

\* Placing students in actual force-on-force fights is a very effective technique of reinforcing skills; unfortunately, it presents a high risk of injury and must be closely monitored by a skilled facilitator.



In a classic fatigue drill (for example, the 30-second drill), students strike as hard and fast as possible for the time indicated. As fatigue sets in, the students' technique deteriorates, but they should still exhibit effective strikes administered with maximum effort. Allow students one minute to recover between sets.

A second kind of fatigue drill requires students to do a specified number of exercises (push-ups, jump squats, sprawls, or the like) and then execute a skill. For example, students perform 10 Burpee exercises (full body exercise used in strength training) followed by a choke defense. Repeat this same exercise five times.

A third iteration of the fatigue drill is the pyramid drill. The pyramid drill increases repetitions between a series of fatiguing exercises. For example, the kick pyramid has students kick a pad, sprawl, recover, then kick twice and sprawl. Next, they will kick three times, sprawl, and so on, up to ten kicks; once complete, they switch kicking legs. The pyramid can be done ascending (up to ten) and then descending (back down from ten to one) for increased difficulty.

## **Aggression Drills**

Aggression drills inculcate the physical toughness needed to survive critical incidents. They are designed to bring out the inner warrior and teach students to not quit. They require the student to demonstrate a commitment to win even when combat becomes difficult to maintain.

In the first type of aggression drill—the gauntlet—a student forces his way through two lines of students who push against him with striking pads to slow him down. His goal is to reach the opponent waiting at other end of the gauntlet. Once the opponent is engaged, the student strikes a pad held by the opponent or addresses a choke.

A second type of aggression drill requires continuous self-defenses. The officer will face two or more attackers who are staggered around the officer. Each attacker places the student in a self-defense situation (using a choke, headlock, etc.). As soon as one threat is addressed, the next attacker engages. This kind of drill should be timed for two minutes with no recovery time between moves.

## **Sensory Deprivation/Overload Drills**

The aim of the sensory deprivation/overload drill is to cause students to experience unpleasant bodily sensations, such as disorientation, fear, and confusion. This causes them to learn how to fight through these temporary states. Some methods of inducing this kind of experience are to spin students to cause dizziness, have students close their eyes before responding to threats, and/or creating loud noises that distract them.

In the concussion drill, students spin for 20 seconds around a stationary object like a yardstick or pole and then spar with a partner for 30 seconds. The spin around a fixed object mimics the experience of sustaining a concussion caused by a blow to the head. Students who spar under these conditions must adjust their strategy to compensate for a compromised sense of balance and perception.

In the black-out drill, students close their eyes before the drill begins. They open their eyes when they feel an attack, then address the threat. This drill simulates a momentary shock of unexpected assault or loss of consciousness. Fighting under these conditions is an important habit to develop, as combat with a skilled opponent can (and often does) result in a compromised sense of perception.

In the overload drill, students will operate in a training environment that will be rife with noise from extra role players who do not actually engage the officer, but scream, threaten, or make a great deal of noise from near the confrontation. Alternately, loud music or other disturbing sounds can be used to the same effect. However the overload situation is created, the principle is the same: extraneous noise creates an overwhelming sensation in the student. They must learn to selectively attend to the threats in terms of the physical danger posed. This experience teaches judgment skills. Just because a situation is loud does not mean that it is dangerous. Specifically for police officers, this drill prepares students to manage confrontations that occur in particularly noisy circumstances, such as nightclubs, parties, or areas of high vehicle traffic, without becoming distracted from a threat.

## Examples of Drills

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### Interview Stance Drill #1

Divide students into two groups. One group (the “officers”) will wear their duty belts and all issued equipment for this drill. The other group (the “suspects”) will remove duty belts, uniform shirts, and vest. The officer’s hands should be at chest height, either holding a ticket book, small notebook, or a clip board. If empty-handed, the fingertips of one hand may touch those of the other. Officers close their eyes while standing in the interview stance, while suspects take up a position within five feet of their partner.

**Role Players:** At the direction of the instructor, the officers will open their eyes, locate the threat, turn to face the suspect, and give a loud, verbal command. The suspect will comply with the officer’s orders.

**Grading:** At no time should the officer be relaxed or otherwise unready to respond to force as needed. Officers should appear focused and ready for escalation from this position.

**Trainer Insight:** The anticipation of a threat will reinforce the development of the student's mindset to be ready for action, not simply relaxed, while in the interview stance. This drill is not conducted to merely disorient or surprise students. Training for quick threat identification is the purpose of this drill.

## Interview Stance Drill #2

Students are broken into two groups. One group, the officers, will retain all of their equipment. The second group, the suspects, will remove police equipment and wear undershirts, pants, and boots only. Two students will be selected at random to participate, while the rest of the students observe. One student will be the officer and the other will be the suspect. The officer will be staged with his back turned to the class until told to turn around. The officer is told that, when the action begins, he is to get in a safe position and give verbal commands to control the suspect.

**Role Players:** The suspect will place his hands under his shirt, behind his back, or in his pockets. The suspect will face away from the officer and keep his hands out of view until ordered to turn around by the officer.

**Grading:** The officer should give strong verbal commands of "POLICE!" and give subsequent clear commands to the suspect. The officer takes up a tactically sound position and evaluates, which should be a position at 45 degrees to the side and front of the suspect with the weapon side away from the suspect. A reactionary gap of at least six feet should be maintained by the officer.

**Trainer Insight:** This drill trains students to maintain a reactionary gap, providing key distance if the officer needs to transition to a more defensive posture. Officers often "roll up" on evolving situations that cannot be anticipated. Beginning to use authoritative verbal commands to suspects is another key lesson of this drill. Recommended language might include, "Show me your hands."

## Defensive Stance Drill #1

Have students wear their duty belts and all issued equipment for this drill. The chosen student closes his eyes while standing in the interview stance. He should respond with identifying the threat and assuming a defensive stance when he hears the suspect shout.

**Role Player(s):** One suspect takes up a position in front, behind, or to the side of the officer, within five feet of the student. At the instructor's direction, the suspect shouts in an aggressive manner at the officer. Upon hearing the shout, the student must open his eyes, identify the location of the suspect

and assume a defensive stance facing the threat, issuing the verbal command: “POLICE! BACK OFF!”

**Grading:** The student should locate the suspect within a very short time and take up a good position. A defensive posture requires the interview stance with hands up and forward. The student should appear ready for combat with the suspect and give loud verbal commands. The student must keep his weapon side away at all times. Thus, if the suspect is behind a right-handed officer, the officer should turn counterclockwise, keeping the weapon side away. If the officer turns clockwise and exposes his weapon side, corrective action is recommended to reinforce learning.

**Trainer Insight:** Loss of visual cues increases the student’s stress level. This drill reinforces realism, as the officer does not know where his attacker is prior to the drill. The student’s heart rate and breathing should be escalated during this drill. This increased heart rate will add to the student’s recognition of increased stress and reinforce the routine management of that sensation. Drills that apply psychological stress increase the student’s ability to cope with combat-induced stress under real-life conditions.

Shouting suspects replicate the realism of street encounters. Often, fighting words are used before the suspects assault police officers. Instructors should allow colorful terms, including profanity, to be used by suspects, if this adds to the realism of the scenario.

## Defensive Stance Drill #2

Have students wear their duty belts and all issued equipment for this drill. The chosen student will engage in 60 to 90 seconds of physical exertion at the direction of the instructor, then close his eyes while standing in the interview stance. He should respond with identifying the threat and assuming a defensive stance when he hears the suspect shout.

**Role Player(s):** One suspect takes up a position in front, behind, or to the side of the officer, within five feet of the student. At the instructor’s direction, the suspect shouts in an aggressive manner at the officer. Upon hearing the shout, the student must open his eyes, identify the location of the suspect, and assume a defensive stance facing the threat, issuing the verbal command: “POLICE! BACK OFF!”

**Grading:** The student should locate the suspect within a very short time and take up a good position. A defensive posture requires the interview stance with hands up and forward. The student should appear ready for combat with the suspect and give loud verbal commands. The student must keep his weapon side away at all times, as in the previous drill. Note the influence of fatigue on the student’s form and command voice. Do not allow the student’s performance to deteriorate after exertion.

**Trainer Insight:** This drill instills the beginnings of toughness in students. The aim of this drill is to demonstrate the escalating consequences of physical activity on the human body. One way to reinforce the physiological reaction to stress is to elicit the sensations of accelerated heart rate, increased rate of respiration, and tunnel vision within the trainee. This end is best accomplished by priming the trainee to become fatigued through exertion. For example, the trainee can perform 10 push-ups, stand up, close his eyes, and then execute the drills. Have the student repeat this cycle five times and he is going to begin to get tired. Execution of stances and command language while fatigued is challenging; however, these are the exact circumstances under which police officers will be involved in physical confrontations. Often, criminals resist arrest following a foot chase or other physically demanding encounter. The officer's high level of physical conditioning may be the factor that saves his life.

### Defensive Stance Drill #3

Have students wear their duty belts and all issued equipment for this drill. Students close their eyes while standing in the interview stance. The student is told to respond as soon as he hears any noise or commotion. He will identify the threat, give a verbal command of "POLICE! BACK OFF!" and assume a defensive stance.

**Role Players:** One suspect is positioned at arm's reach to the officer, either to the left, right, front, or behind the student. When the action begins, the suspect will reach for the officer's firearm. Three to five other role players will take up a position more than 10 feet from the student. At the direction of the instructor, the role players will shout or scream at the student from the periphery while the suspect will remain quiet.

**Trainer Insight:** Combat does not happen in a vacuum. There is very often confusion and bewilderment when officers are attacked. In order to defeat this response delay due to confusion, this drill reinforces a shorter time lag in identification and response to a threat. Evolutions of the drill include the use of loud noises (sirens, shouting, etc.) to increase stress and disorientation of students. Once again, the addition of noise and distraction removes the complacency mindset of trainees and more closely simulates the experience of real combat.

### Straight Punch Drill #1

**Time:** Thirty (30) seconds (increase to 60 and 90 seconds when level of conditioning permits).

**Action:** Pair up students. One student (the "holder") holds a striking pad tightly to his chest while the other student (the "officer") does maximum

repetitions of straight punches (either jab, cross, or combination) in the direction of the holder. Students then switch positions and continue the drill.

**Trainer Insight:** Correct holding of the pads is crucial to protect the wrist of the striking students. Holders get some exposure to stress by receiving the (diminished) force of the punches. Officers who administer strikes note the increasing fatigue after only 30 seconds of effort. Ensure that effort does not diminish over the course of the drill; all students must give maximum effort until relieved by the instructor or corrective actions are recommended.

### **Palm Heel Strike Drill #1**

**Time:** Thirty (30) seconds (increase to 60 and 90 seconds when level of conditioning permits).

**Action:** Pair up students. One student acts as the pad holder, while the officer closes his eyes while standing in a defensive stance. The holder circles around the officer and shoves him randomly. Once struck, the officer opens his eyes, locates the holder, and does maximum repetitions of palm heel strikes, using both hands, for three to five seconds. Each student remains in the same position (officer or holder) for two minutes. Students then switch positions and continue the drill.

**Trainer Insight:** Holders should seek to activate the adrenaline response of the officers by increasing the force over the duration of the drill. This force escalation establishes a will within the officer to continue fighting through fear and fatigue. Officers should fight through poor techniques and instead focus on shortening the reactionary delay once struck. Techniques can be improved over time; the key competency for this drill is execution without hesitation. This process gradually hones survival instincts to respond immediately and defensively when faced with an unexpected use of force.

### **Hammer Fist Drill #1**

**Time:** Two (2) minutes.

**Action:** The officer assumes a defensive stance with his eyes closed. Four pad holders surround an officer—one in front, one on each side, and one behind. At the direction of the instructor, each pad holder in turn shouts at the officer, who will react with a hammer fist strike.

**Trainer Insight:** Pads must be held at the ideal hammer fist distance for each student; too far for an elbow and too close for a straight punch. The shouts should be alarming and given in quick succession from multiple holders to assure there is minimal or no rest for the officer between iterations. As soon as the officer resets to position, the action begins again. As with most ICS drills, the fatigue and adrenaline levels should increase, giving students the opportunity to experience combat fatigue conditions.

To escalate this training drill to a higher level of difficulty, have the officer lie face down on the ground before each shout-and-strike contact. This sprawl position requires significant energy expenditure to overcome, especially after three or more repetitions. In order to strike, the student must first get up from the prone position, identify the threat and then attack quickly. Focus on rapid recovery from the ground and precision attacks. Random, weak, or indiscriminate strikes that do not conform to the standard should be handled with corrective action.

This drill inculcates the ability to be unfazed by a strike that unbalances or places the officer on the ground. Reinforcing the “get-back-up-and-fight” mentality is critical to surviving violent attacks that are unexpected. Until students master ground fighting techniques (discussed in-depth in Chapter 8), they must regain their fighting platform quickly and without freezing up in response to the initial shock of an assault. This drill provides practice for that exact circumstance.

## Elbow Strike Drill #1

**Time:** Two (2) minutes.

**Action:** The officer assumes a defensive stance and closes his eyes. The pad holder takes up a position close to the officer in any direction: side, front, or rear. From this position, the pad holder will touch (not push) the officer with the pad. The officer must open his eyes, locate the threat and deliver an elbow strike.

**Trainer Insight:** This drill is slower paced than most ICS drills. The focus is on execution of the technique with violent action and precision. Pad holders must be very close to the officers. In fact, it may be helpful to maintain contact with the pad touching the officer until he strikes.

Pad holders can use vertical or horizontal orientations to elicit different elbow strikes—upper, lower, and side delivery—from the officers.

## Final Commentary on Drills

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Police trainers, in particular, have a solemn duty to prepare their students for battle. Although we hope they will never have to face the fight of their lives, we also know that it is likely they will find themselves in harm’s way as a result of the profession they have chosen. Merely wearing the badge makes our students a target for aggression. As a result, allowing students to merely eke their way through drills is unacceptable. Students must master their own fears and limitations and commit to improving their mental and physical skills during highly realistic training.



High-quality drills emphasize realism in simulated combat conditions. Students must be allowed to experience emotional struggle, a degree of fatigue, and physical pain to develop the toughness mindset that will allow them to win the fight for their lives. Trainers who have experienced true combat situations provide the best insight into the particular psychological and physiological states induced by dangerous confrontations.

It is important to note that role players must be tightly managed by instructors to ensure that the shouting and screaming noises during drills made are more primal, and not humorous, in nature. Role players must express loud emotions of fear, horror, and anger when assisting with drills. Making emotionally charged verbalizations like cries for help and war cries are especially recommended.

Early training in the continuing need for weapon retention is critical. Even an untrained, instinctual reaction of a student is better than no reaction at all. Earlier chapters focused on ICS weapon retention methods; however, this fundamental awareness needs to be reinforced as often as possible in police training. The reality is that suspects can and will disarm and kill police officers with the officer's own weapons.

Well-designed drills will not be easy for students to master. They will challenge students to push themselves to develop new skills and master novel circumstances. Thus, they create a warrior mentality that will serve students well in the real world. After all, actual combat on the street is not the time to recognize you are unprepared for the worst case scenario.



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